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THE INDEPENDENT

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Women lose up to £10bn under Labour

Measures proposed by the Chancellor of the Exchequer since 1 May could end up making women billions of pounds poorer.

Dione Coyle, Economics Editor, examines the hidden gender bias in Gordon Brown's plans.

Changes to government spending plans since the general election, and proposals for a new tax credit put forward in last week's Green Budget, overwhelmingly penalise women and favour men. Women could be up to £10bn worse off as a result of Mr Brown's policies, while the increased "New Deal" spending on welfare-to-work programmes heavily favours men, according to independent researchers.

The biggest threat to women's pockets comes from Mr Brown's intention, signalled last week, to introduce a "working families' tax credit". Experts reckon it could cost female earners billions of pounds.

Unlike Family Credit, the existing benefit for low-earner households, the new tax credit would go directly into the pay packet of the household's main earner. In three-fifths of eligible families, that is the man.



Gordon Brown: Proposed measures hit women hard

The Government's controversial decision to go ahead with the cut to lone parent benefit is just one example of the emerging gender bias. It will save £400m a year from the social security budget, and the Government has insisted that it has no alternative but to go ahead with it because of the pressure on the public finances.

The burden will fall almost entirely on single mothers. Of Britain's 1.4 million lone parents with dependent children, 1.28 million are women and only 120,000 are men.

Alistair Darling, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, yesterday defended the cut in lone parent benefit, saying it was more important to get people back to work than to pay them benefits. Speaking on *On The Record*, he said: "We have brought forward as Gordon Brown announced last week, the welfare-to-work programme which will provide a million places for children, enabling lone parents to get into work."

But Ann Cryer, Labour MP for Knightley, said: "My message for Labour MPs, particularly the 101 Labour women MPs, is that I think we ought to stand together on this and we ought to send a message to women outside those who are going to

be on the receiving end, that we're on their side."

In the Green Budget, Mr Brown said £300m would be spent on up to 30,000 after-school clubs, with £20m coming from Lottery funds. This followed the announcement in July of extra spending of £200m over three years on a scheme to help lone parents claiming benefit get back into work. However, the £500m combined spending on the programmes compares with the £3.2bn Mr Brown allocated for young people unemployed for more than six months. The "New Deal" programme gives four alternatives to work: full-time education, a subsidy to be taken up by a private-sector employer, voluntary work or a position on a new environmental task force.

Although the number has been falling rapidly since the introduction last October of the Job Seekers' Allowance, there are still 122,096 18-to-24 year olds who have been out of work for longer than six months, according to the latest official figures. Of those nearly three-quarters (89,387) are men. One adviser to the Government privately acknowledging that the schemes favour men said: "Single motherhood is the female equivalent to these long-term unemployed youths."

The expenditure on returning young people to work amounts to more than £26,000 per head, compared to £350 per head per lone parent. Although the Government has made plain its determination for single parents to work wherever possible, making a real dent in the numbers claiming benefit will be very expensive because of the cost of childcare.

The new working families tax credit looks set to be equally controversial. If the credit directly replaced Family Credit, which is paid to the woman in three-fifths of cases, rather than supplementing it, it would represent a transfer of about £400m from men to women, according to the Institute for Fiscal Studies (IFS), an independent research body.

In addition, the working families tax credit would almost certainly require the reintroduction for claimants of the joint taxation of husbands and wives - or cohabiting partners.

The full abolition of independent taxation of men and women introduced by Nigel Lawson in 1988, would cost women £14bn because second earners would start paying tax on their first pound of income. It would drive many women who work part-time back into the home by making it not worth their while to work.

While the Government would be extremely unlikely to impose joint taxation on all couples - which would be politically explosive - the proposed tax credit will require claimants to opt for joint taxation. Otherwise, it would unfairly reward poorly paid second earners with a high-income partner.

Chris Giles, an economist at the IFS, said: "A switch to any form of joint taxation would cost women a huge amount of money." This figure would run into several billions, he said. While their husband or partner would gain the new tax credit, many women would have to pay much more tax.



Japan singled out the United States as the key to the success or failure of the world conference on climate, which opens today in the ancient Japanese city of Kyoto.

The former Japanese capital is a city of old palaces and places of worship that hark back to the imperial past, where parents still dress children in traditional costumes (above) for ceremonies at the ancient shrines to pray for their future happiness.

The Japanese see the Kyoto con-

ference as one of the keys to its future happiness as well. Tokyo wants a diplomatic triumph, to confirm its image as a great modern power, and to banish the lingering opprobrium from the Second World War. The 160 states attending are due to hammer out an agreement on reducing gases such as carbon dioxide, set off by burning oil and other fossil fuels.

But a wide gap still exists between the Europeans, who back significant cuts in emissions, and the United

States, where public opinion fears such cuts will lead inexorably to a sharp increase in the cost of living.

Campaigners have invested Kyoto with enormous expectations. A Greenpeace spokesman, Bill Hare, said: "This is not just the last great battle of the 20th century, this is the most important environmental negotiation ever conducted."

Photograph: David Swarborough
Kyoto summit, page 7
Letters, page 12

TODAY'S NEWS

Eye transplant from woman with CJD

The risk of organ transplants was highlighted after it was disclosed that eye tissue from a woman was transplanted into three patients before it was discovered she had been suffering from Creutzfeld Jakob disease. Officials said "immediate action" was being taken to improve safety checks, but it was unclear what they might be. Page 3

Museums' lottery error

Museums may have undermined their own case against charging fees by accepting hundreds of millions from the National Lottery and spending it on new buildings rather than on developing their services, according to the independent Policy Studies Institute. Page 3

Minister's tax-free £12m

The £12m held in a blind trust in Guernsey on behalf of Geoffrey Robinson, the Paymaster General, would never come under British tax jurisdiction, according to his colleagues. Alistair Darling, Chief Secretary to the Treasury, said that Mr Robinson's money came from a Belgian woman who held it in Switzerland, and that nothing improper had been done. Page 4

Nazi gold conference

The head of the Swiss delegation to tomorrow's London conference on Nazi gold yesterday said his country had done enough to compensate victims. He fears the conference will continue to make the Swiss scapegoats, while other countries escape opprobrium. Page 8

INSIDE TODAY

Terrible truths about badgers
ENVIRONMENT

Deborah Ross asks Andrew Morton the £5m question
INTERVIEW

Harry Evans, back in the old New York biz
MEDIA+

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CROSSWORDS Page 20 and the Eye, page 9
WEATHER The Eye, page 10

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2/BRIEFING

COLUMN ONE

Clean-living robot moves into the sitting room

In his novel *3001*, the science fiction writer Arthur C Clarke envisaged a future where tiny housemaid robots came out at night to take care of domestic chores while humans were asleep. That dream looks set to move a little closer to reality - with the advent of the self-operating vacuum cleaner.

The domestic robot, which can be left to clean the carpets unsupervised and more thoroughly than by human hand, is set to be unveiled today by one of the world's biggest electronic companies. The miniature, disc-shaped Electrolux android (pictured) is able to navigate its way around a room without collisions, due to an electronic brain and sophisticated navigational radar system. Its shape is said to have been inspired by the trilobite, an arthropod which lived hundreds of millions of years ago and survived by crawling along the ocean bed, sucking up microscopic debris.

The man who likes exotic hi-tech electronic gadgets for Christmas might not appreciate its menial nature, but when it goes into mass production in the next few years, he should at least find it affordable - it is expected to retail for about £500 in high-street stores.

The robot is battery-powered and initially travels slowly around a room, "memorising" its dimensions. Its height enables it to travel under furniture and it can move around small objects without touching them. It cleans 95 per cent of the accessible floor area, compared with an average 75 per cent for humans (although some households might treat 75 per cent as unusually clean). The robot takes approximately 20 minutes to clean an average-sized living room, and it can do an entire floor if doors are left open. It is able to do this because it is mounted on high-grip rubber wheels and a central castor, which allows it to swerve out of the way of obstacles. It is, however, unable to negotiate stairs.

Last June, Japanese scientists unveiled their prototype "delivery robot", designed to move around homes or offices. Other domestic robots said to be in development include Honda's two-legged waiter, and a small machine that can crawl up drainpipes in order to clean gutters. Perhaps mindful of the domestic panics caused by appliances being left on, Electrolux have ensured that their vacuum cleaner turns itself off when finished, and some models will automatically return to an electronic charging stand.

As Electrolux's offices were unmanned yesterday, *The Independent* was unable to determine whether the vacuum cleaner would also mean that there was something on the television that it wanted to watch, keep hold of all loose change found under the sofa, and then demand admiration for having performed the task.

— Jojo Moyes

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TOURIST RATES

Australia (dollars)	2.38	Italy (lira)	2,822
Austria (schillings)	20.15	Japan (yen)	211.46
Belgium (francs)	59.19	Malta (lira)	0.63
Canada (\$)	2.32	Netherlands (guilder)	3.23
Cyprus (pounds)	0.83	Norway (kroner)	11.77
Denmark (kroner)	10.98	Portugal (escudos)	291.05
France (francs)	9.60	Spain (pesetas)	241.91
Germany (marks)	2.87	Sweden (kroner)	12.70
Greece (drachmai)	457.95	Switzerland (francs)	2.33
Hong Kong (\$)	12.56	Turkey (lira)	316,402
Ireland (pounds)	1.09	USA (\$)	1.63

Source: Thomas Cook

Rates for indication purposes only

PEOPLE



Lucille McLaughlin: Married yesterday to long-standing boyfriend, Grant Ferrie

Saudi nurse weds in 'unforgettable' ceremony

British nurse Lucille McLaughlin, held for nearly a year in a Saudi jail over the killing of a fellow nurse, yesterday married her fiancé in an unprecedented and "unforgettable" ceremony.

The Foreign Office confirmed that McLaughlin married her long-time boyfriend Grant Ferrie in a courthouse in Damman. The wedding was conducted by a Saudi judge, and witnessed by a British consular official. The nurse's brother, John, travelled to Saudi Arabia for the event but her parents did not go without showing their commitment to each other.

"Even under the nightmare when she was facing the death penalty they were adamant to get married and were seeking permission," Mr Hejailian said.

The go-ahead for the wedding came after lengthy negotiations between Saudis and British diplomats. McLaughlin later returned to prison, where, according to defence lawyer Sala al-Hejailian, she took some of the wedding cake for her co-defendant Deborah Parry.

Mr Hejailian said the fact that the "unprecedented" ceremony was taking place showed Saudi officials could be flexible and understanding.

"There are many unprecedented elements in this case and this is one of them, for a female foreign prisoner to get married," he said.

The lawyer said that visits by her husband would

be allowed by the authorities after the marriage, in line with Saudi practice, and these would take place in "specific premises" within the jail.

Family friends have said that the couple, who knew each other before the former Dundee nurse travelled to the Arab kingdom, had planned to marry in June, and both had decided they did not want the year to go by without showing their commitment to each other.

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McLaughlin was convicted of the lesser crime of being an accomplice in the death, and Saudi lawyers say they are optimistic that both women will serve only a short term and that Saudi authorities will allow the sentence to be served in Britain.

— Jojo Moyes

Politics brought Dobbs 'passion and despair'

After years poring the dark corridors of power, Michael Dobbs found fame writing political novels with many a twist and turn. Now his own life appears to be following one of his plots.

The former Conservative Party deputy chairman revealed yesterday that he has paid a heavy price, personal and financial, for his life long affair with politics. He was, he said, "in the darkness of private despair".

Mr Dobbs' wife Amanda, the mother of his two sons, recently became a Buddhist lama taking the name O-Sel. The couple's £500,000 dairy farm in Bridport, Dorset, is now for sale. He had written one book in the last three years, and has had "no income" for the last two.

The author, whose Westminster trilogy — *House of Cards*, *To Play the Game* —

King and *The Final Cut* — became a highly successful television series, denied that he was facing bankruptcy. He said the reason for the sale of the home was "because of changes in my private life. This has been brought about by my long involvement in politics, which has gone on perhaps for too many years."

"Politics has been a passion that has taken me from the heights of public joy to the darkness of private despair, cost me a fortune and my home. Yes, that may make me a bloody fool, but it has meant that much to me".

A phrase from Mr Dobbs' fictional Prime Minister Francis Urohart has entered the language — "You may well say that, but I cannot possibly comment". Yesterday the author was similarly enigmatic about his 17-year marriage: "My private circumstances are my private

circumstances and they will remain so. One of the reasons why I have never gone into electoral politics is for this very reason — to remain private. The idea that everyone in politics is on the make is hopelessly wrong. Financial and personal costs are great ... I am not complaining, it's merely a fact of political life."

The former chief of staff to Lord Tebbit said he was proud of his achievements. He was with Baroness Thatcher when she went into No 10, and worked for John Major. However, he believes that under William Hague the party is "sleepwalking towards disaster".

Mr Dobbs is now working on his seventh novel, *The Buddha of Brewer Street*, about a fictional Dalai Lama born in Soho, central London. He plans to move to London to continue with his writing.

— Kim Sengupta

UPDATE

Apology to Versace

On Wednesday, 16th July we printed an article entitled "Darkness Behind the Glamour" following the murder of Gianni Versace. We regret any implication that Mr Gianni Versace could not support his lifestyle by legitimate means, that he overreached himself or that he had any involvement with the Mafia or money-laundering activities by organised crime. We also wish to make it clear that there was no intention whatsoever to suggest that any of the Versace companies or Mr Gianni Versace's brother, Santo Versace, or his sister, Donatella Versace, were so involved and we accept that any such suggestion would be wholly unsubstantiated and untrue. We apologise unreservedly for the distress this has caused the Versace family and we have agreed to pay substantial compensation to Versace which will be used by Versace for charitable purposes.

BEHAVIOUR Children imitate TV violence

One-quarter of parents believe their children behave in an anti-social manner after watching certain videos or television programmes, according to a new survey. Imitating screen violence is the main problem and the effects are most marked on younger children, aged under 10, says the study.

Interviews with 500 parents by set-top box maker Pace Micro Technology, reported lack of concentration, hyperactivity and increased materialism, but the main worry was imitation of screen violence, particularly in the under-10s. Of those who reported anti-social behaviour, 17 per cent complained of imitating violence. Among the programmes cited as culprits were *Power Rangers*, which was the most frequently named by 8 per cent of parents, followed by *Gladiators* with 1 per cent.

VIDEOS



TRANSPORT

Rural young at a disadvantage

Unemployed youngsters in rural areas could miss out on discounted travel to job interviews because of poor public transport, the Government has been warned. The Rural Development Commission said it was concerned that young people in rural regions would find it difficult to get the chance of training or job opportunities. Transport groups National Express and Stagecoach have announced travel discounts for youngsters on the Government's flagship "New Deal" employment programme. But John Edwards, operations director at the commission, said: "Travel discounts are fine for young people who have access to public transport. What happens to those who live in remote rural areas where transport is non-existent in some cases?"

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

Firms benefit from power-sharing

Relations between workers and their managers improve if employees are given greater involvement, according to a new survey. Partnership between unions and management in industry was "widespread", the poll of 50 organisations by research group Industrial Relations Services found. Half said that they usually adopted a power-sharing approach, involving workers in day-to-day decisions. But two in five said they made decisions, and expected workers to fit in. Most said worker-management relations had improved as a result of greater employee involvement.

SOCIETY

Go north for a chat

When it comes to taking time for a chat, northerners are the friendliest. mobile phone operator Orange says. Research by the company found that on average 40 per cent of Britons had talked to their neighbours within the last week except in London where only 14 per cent stopped for a chat. And only 17 per cent of Londoners would join in a conversation at a bus stop — against a national average of 37.5 per cent. Birmingham was most chatty — 55 per cent of those surveyed had talked to their neighbours in the last week. The Scots are the most talkative shoppers — 74 per cent of those surveyed in Edinburgh stop to talk when they pay for their groceries.

7.30 FOR 8

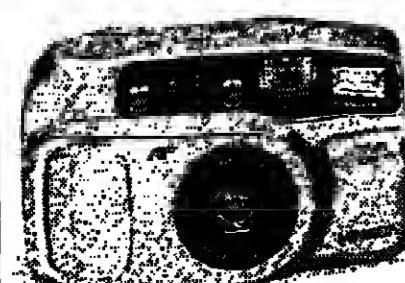
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ZITS

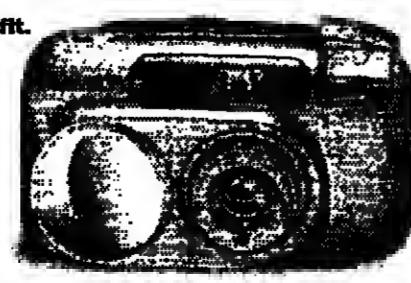
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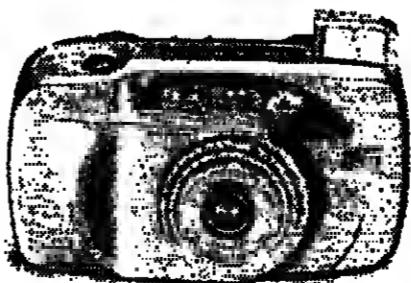
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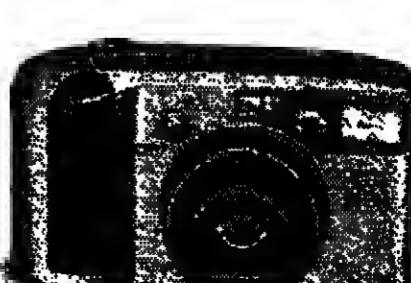
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3/LEADING STORIES

IN TOMORROW'S 5-SECTION INDEPENDENT

The do's and don'ts of making toddlers eat right



Dr Phil Hammond finds a cure for road rage



Roy Scheider: a star to everyone but his father



Museum charges 'inevitable' after lottery-fuelled building spree

Museum charges are inevitable, according to a report by the Policy Studies Institute. David Lister, Arts News Editor, examines its findings, which blame the National Lottery as well as museum directors obsessed with glamorous rebuilding projects.

Lottery money awarded to museums and galleries may have the unforeseen effect of making admission charges inevitable.

A report to be published today by the Policy Studies Institute, the independent think tank, says the reason is that so much money has been spent on glamorous building projects and so little on essential work such as conservation, documentation and services for the public, including widening access.

Some of the national museums and galleries fighting to remain free have won large lottery sums for redevelopment and rebuilding projects: The British Museum, Tate Gallery and National Portrait Gallery are among these.

According to the latest edition of *Cultural Trends* from the PSI, 73 per cent of the £294m of lottery money that has been awarded to museums and galleries is being spent on new building projects.

Only 5 per cent of the money was spent on conservation and documentation. One striking contrast is that £215m has gone to new building and a mere £141,000 to research, hitherto one of the main activities for museums.

One museum director told the PSI that the lottery had "promoted greed" among his colleagues. And the PSI report concludes that the big building projects now being undertaken "might not be sustainable in the long term" because of the increased running costs they will incur. That alone hastens the introduction of charges among the museums that remain free.

In a damning conclusion, the PSI observes: "Applicants may have deliberately sought funding for major building projects, rather than conservation and documentation projects which are less visible and may be less attractive to sponsors or certain partnership funders... Moreover, there are indications that the lottery may well have

distracted museums from these core functions [conservation and documentation]." The report also notes that lottery funding was not distributed evenly across the country. More than 60 per cent of it was spent in London, and more than half went to just a dozen museums and galleries. No awards were made for new buildings, refurbishment or equipment in Northern Ireland, and nothing was spent on new buildings, acquisitions or commissions in the North-east.

The PSI conducted a national survey of museum directors for its information. This also found, despite the fact that one-fifth of museums are based in Scotland, they represent only 7 per cent of all charging museums. The majority of museums which charge visitors are based in the south of England and in the Midlands. It also found that the Government is making these decisions on ambiguous and contradictory research. The Museums and Galleries Commission says that museum attendance fell by one-third between 1993 and 1995 - a period when, according to the British Tourist Authority, numbers were constant.

The Government will make a statement in the next 10 days about charging. It is likely to distance itself from its commitment to free admission at national museums and galleries following the Culture Secretary Chris Smith's failure to convince the Treasury to give an increase in funds. But it may increase the grant to the British Museum to prevent it from introducing charges in the near future. But that action could provoke a museum war as Dr Alan Borg, head of the Victoria and Albert Museum, has said he would not tolerate the British Museum receiving a "handout" and his museum getting nothing.

The Government's likely abandonment of the principle of free admission contradicts earlier commitments. The Prime Minister, Tony Blair, said in February when he was leader of the Opposition: "We are concerned about the introduction of admission charges in national museums. The evidence suggests that high charges can lead to a big decline in attendance." The Arts Minister, Mark Fisher, told the Commons in June: "We do not want anyone to be charged entry to national museums and galleries."

"*Cultural Trends*", £17.95, available from Grantham Books 01476 541080.

Letters, page 14



Craig Easton

Publican tries to make sense of poster backlash

A Liverpool publican is claiming there has been a near-boycott of his pub after a Guinness promotional poster featuring the Ku Klux Klan was put up in his absence.

Jojo Moyes reports.

Landlord Peter Doherty, 39, says that the Stag's Head, near Toxteth, has suffered since the prototype poster, which features Ku Klux Klan members under Guinness's current advertising slogan "Not everything in black and white makes sense", appeared in his pub in September.

Mr Doherty claims the poster must

have been put up by a Guinness representative while he was away on business. When he returned, he said, his largely multicultural clientele accused him of being a racist. Windows and furnishings were damaged and the pub was shunned by locals.

Although he had immediately removed the poster, local students and medical personnel, who had previously formed much of his custom, he claimed, shunned the pub.

"Reps come by a lot, to do promotions and put posters up, and I've got beer mats. On this particular occasion I was off on business," he said.

"When I came back, a couple of days later, people had complained and called me a racist. We had a broken table, bro-

ken glasses, and some of the furniture had been slashed. Our windows got broken in the middle of the night. We'd never had anything like this before."

Mr Doherty claims he has had so many telephone calls accusing him of being a racist and "white trash" that he has been forced to disconnect his telephone and use a pager.

"It shouldn't have happened. It's disgusting to me, and I'm white. We're only two miles from Toxteth here, and it's just not a good idea to stir up racial tensions in this area."

But a spokesman for Guinness yesterday said that the local salesmen had not visited the pub during the time concerned. He said it was a mystery as to where the poster had come from, as the

only copies of that particular design had been shelved at proof stage.

"We were producing the commercial and this was one of the scenes in the original script. We proofed up some posters, and they went out to some of the sales force, but then we did some research with consumers and found that this particular Ku Klux Klan theme was perhaps tending to cause offence with coloured people," he said.

"We subsequently took the decision to withdraw it, as the last thing we wanted to do was offend. The whole reason for putting the Ku Klux Klan in was to ridicule them." The spokesman added that Guinness wanted to get to the bottom of the matter, and had instructed its lawyers to investigate further.

Transplant patients risk CJD after receiving tissue from infected woman

Transplant experts said yesterday that three patients who received donated tissue from the eyes of a woman suffering from CJD could be at risk of developing the disease.

But they insisted that the benefits of transplants far outweigh the risks, says Jeremy Laurance, Health Editor.

A new threat to Britain's transplant programme emerged yesterday after it was disclosed that a woman who died of lung cancer was later allegedly found to have been suffering from Creutzfeldt Jakob disease after tissue from her eyes had been transplanted into three other patients.

The woman, named by a newspaper as Marion Hamilton, was reported to have agreed to the use of her organs before her death at the age of 53. The corneas from her eyes together with the sclera (the white of the eye) from one were given to three patients. Later, a routine post-mortem ex-

amination is understood to have shown that she had CJD.

The Scottish Office said in a statement that it was aware of the "potential infection of eye tissue taken from a patient. Immediate action is being taken to increase safety checks to minimise the chances of this happening," it said.

It was unclear last night what those safety checks might be. Robina Balderson, chief executive of the UK Transplant Authority, said doctors had to judge whether a patient's organs were suitable for transplant on the basis of the best information avail-

able at the time. They could not wait for the result of a post-mortem examination because organs must be transplanted fresh. She said 5,000 patients a year received transplanted organs or tissue and there were 6,000 on the waiting list.

"Every single transplant either saves the life or the sight of a patient. This case is clearly tragic for the family concerned but I would be horrified if it increased the fear of those on the waiting list or reduced the number of donors coming forward."

Doctors are required to follow strict guidelines in deciding whether the organs

from a patient who has died are suitable for transplant. Infection with HIV or hepatitis, for example, would automatically rule out that patient's organs for transplant.

Evidence from abroad has shown that CJD can be transmitted via corneal transplants and in other neurosurgical procedures although no cases have occurred in Britain. However, there is no test for CJD and it can only be confirmed by a post-mortem examination of the brain.

Professor Jeff Almond, an expert on CJD and a member of the Government's Spongiform Encephalopathy Advisory Committee (SEAC), said it was by no means certain that the patients who had received the donated tissue would develop CJD. "It could be a very rare event. I'm not aware of any study showing how frequent it is." He said the risks had to be balanced against the benefits of the transplant.

John Dark, transplant surgeon at the Freeman Hospital, Newcastle upon Tyne, said: "CJD is vanishingly rare. There is an element of risk in everything we do in transplant surgery. Compared with the other risks we take, the chance of getting CJD are very small."

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5/HEALTH NEWS

Breast screening cuts cancer deaths by half

A 10-year study of breast screening in women under 50 has found it almost halved the death rate from breast cancer. However, British experts tell *Jeremy Lourance*, Health Editor, that although breast screening is effective in younger women it should not be provided on the NHS.

Regular breast screening for early signs of cancer in women aged 39-49 does save lives, researchers have concluded. A study of 11,000 women who were screened every 18 months and 14,000 women who were not found a marked difference in deaths from breast cancer after 10 years.

About one in 28 women in both groups developed cancer but in the screened group 18 died compared with 40 deaths in the unscreened group. The difference, of 45 per cent, is probably attributable to earlier treatment of the screened group.

The study, conducted in Sweden and published in *Cancer*, will add to the controversy over breast screening in younger women which has been dismissed as ineffective. Experts have argued that the greater density of younger women's breasts makes it harder to detect the tiny calcified lumps that can signal the onset of cancer.

An editorial in the journal says this wrongly implies that there is a sudden change in women's breasts at age 50. "Many younger women have fatty breasts, and many older women have denser breasts," it says. Improvements in mammographic techniques have made detection of cancer in women with denser breasts possible but no long-term trials in younger women have been carried out.

Based on the study's findings, the editorial, by Dr Stephen Feig of the Jefferson Medical College, Philadelphia, US, says the death rate might have been reduced by 75 per cent if screening of women aged 40-49 was carried out annually rather than every 18 months.

Dr Robin Wilson, clinical director of the breast service at Nottingham City Hospital, said the findings were "pretty impressive" but said the trial was too small to provide a definitive answer and there were questions about the cost and the risks to women of unnecessary investigations.

The NHS breast screening programme for women aged 50 to 64 is estimated to reduce deaths by 1 per cent at a cost of £35m a year. In women under 50, in whom breast cancer is less common, it has been estimated it would reduce deaths by 0.1 per cent making it 10 times more expensive. The Royal College of Radiologists says women under 50 could benefit from screening but it should not be a freely funded service.

Dr Wilson said: "I don't think there is any doubt that screening done properly does reduce mortality in that age group [39-49]. But is it something the NHS should pay for? The argument is you could save more lives by spending the money in other ways."

A trial of screening involving 195,000 women aged 40 to 41 in 30 centres around the country began in 1991 but it will be 15 years before the results are known because of the need for long-term follow-up of those who develop cancer. Dr Wilson said it was imperative women under 50 offered screening were made aware of the risks. One in 10 women would be recalled for further tests subjecting them to anxiety and the possibility of a biopsy. Some would be falsely reassured because screening cannot detect all cancers. They must be warned to seek medical help should they notice a lump.



A study showing breast screening in women aged 39-49 saves lives will add to the debate over screening younger women

Fears persist over survival of full and free treatment on NHS

Labour's election victory has failed to convince people that the National Health Service is safe. Despite Tony Blair's pledge to restore it after 17 years of Tory rule, four out of five people remain pessimistic about the NHS's future. Most think that in 10 years time the treatments available will either be curtailed or only available to those who pay.

The gloomy prognosis is revealed in a survey of 2,000 adults published by the So-

cial Market Foundation. More than three-quarters of those questioned feel the NHS has too little money and that, despite this, the demands on it are increasing.

There is a division of view about how it will cope with these pressures.

Three out of four think treatments will be rationed and two thirds believe the NHS will provide fewer treatments in 10 years than it does today.

On the other hand, more than half be-

lieve key services such as ambulances, outpatient visits and intensive care will have to be paid for.

Opposition to charging remains widespread, however, with more than half saying they would prefer tax increases to fund the service.

The survey was conducted in late July after the Government had announced the extra £1.2bn for the NHS next year but before it had added the additional £300m to

get hospitals through the winter this year. The findings show how much Frank Dobson, the Secretary of State for Health, and his ministerial colleagues still have to do to rebuild public confidence in the NHS.

Professor Nick Bosanquet and Stephen Pollard say in "Ready for Treatment", a report on the survey, that the findings reveal an expectations gap between what the public would like the NHS to provide

and what they believe it will be capable of delivering.

They add their voices to the growing number calling for the imposition of patient charges.

They say these should be set at a level similar to those already paid for other services: "If a prescription costs £5.75, paying £5 for a visit to the GP is hardly extortionate."

— Jeremy Lourance

**Register now
'or lose your
NHS dentist'**

Patients are being urged to re-register with their dentists before Christmas to avoid being among the four million people who are expected to be dropped from dentists' lists for NHS treatment under changes to the rules by the Government.

From the New Year, any patients who have not seen their dentist since September 1996 will be automatically struck off their dentist's register. Alan Milburn, the health minister, confirmed in a Commons written answer: "The most recent estimate is that registration numbers may gradually fall by about four million as a result of this change."

The numbers have alarmed the British Dental Association, which today will be launching a new initiative to persuade patients to see their dentists before they drop off their lists. They are warning that if patients are de-registered, they will find it difficult to get back on lists because many dentists who still do NHS work are over-stretched.

"The Tories reduced the cut-off point from 24 months to 15 to save money by stopping capitation payments to dentists for patients who never turned up. The Labour government is about to face the task for a Tory cut."

However, the scale of the numbers being removed from NHS dentists' lists was seen by Simon Hughes, the Liberal Democrat, as evidence that NHS dentistry was "in danger of disappearing".

He said: "Unless action is taken to recruit more dentists back into the NHS, this government will be responsible for NHS dentistry being a minority service."

Mr Milburn privately admits that a Tory scheme to reverse the decline in NHS dentistry has failed, and is looking at ways of improving access, including pumping £5m into an initiative this year.

Dentists' leaders believe their fees should be substantially increased to encourage more dentists back into routine NHS work and free dental check-ups, even if it means reducing the scope of the work available on the NHS.

— Colin Brown
Chief Political Correspondent

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Army officer emerges victorious from class warfare

Major Eric Joyce, who was suspended after publishing a pamphlet arguing that the Army was riddled with snobbery and prejudice, is back on duty following an intervention by the Lord Chancellor.
Kim Sengupta charts the shift in his treatment at the hands of officialdom.

The story has come full circle. At one point Major Eric Joyce's public criticism of the armed services' class-ridden culture threatened to lead to his court martial. But now Lord Irvine of Lairg, the Lord Chancellor, has obliged senior officers to rethink: Major Joyce is not only back on duty, but his demands for reform will be debated among fellow officers.

The decision not to court martial Major Joyce is seen as

a U-turn by the army hierarchy. A number of senior officers are said to feel there were enough grounds for charging him for breaking military discipline, and flouting rules on speaking to the media.

Keith Simpson, a Tory MP, claimed there were links between Major Joyce and the Labour Party going back to before the general election, and that Major Joyce had advised John Reid, deputy to George

Robertson, the Secretary of State for Defence, in Opposition. This was denied last night by Dr Reid, who said he met Major Joyce just twice in his role as a member of the all-party defence study group. He had also met "thousands" of other servicemen and women.

Lord Irvine told Mr Robertson in a letter that if Major Joyce was to complain to the European Human Rights Court, he would be likely to sue

against Major Joyce would be "disproportionate", and "the Army should lift Major Joyce's suspension and state he faces no disciplinary action whatsoever".

On 18 November, Major Joyce was told he does not face any charges. Soon afterwards he quietly resumed his duties at the headquarters of the Adjutant General in Upavon, Wiltshire.

However, he certainly does not intend to keep quiet about

his views. The critical pamphlet he wrote for the Fabian Society attacking the forces' antiquated class system will be published as a more detailed version.

George Robertson has said the army should recruit more officers from state schools to avoid the accusation of preserving a privileged élite. He is concerned that while four out of five Royal Navy and RAF officers studied at state schools, only half of all army officer recruits did so.

An MoD spokesman said:

"Major Joyce is in control of this journal and there is no reason

Torture ruling to be challenged

Human rights groups are taking the Director of Public Prosecutions to court over the decision not to prosecute two businessmen supposedly implicated in the torture trade. The case could have wider implications for organisations bringing similar public interest cases, reports Michael Streeter, Legal Affairs Correspondent.

Amnesty International and Redress, a body which works for torture victims, have been given leave to seek judicial review of the DPP's decision not to take criminal proceedings against two salesmen working for the British defence industry. The pair were allegedly shown in a Channel 4 documentary *The British Torture Trade* demonstrating how to sell electro-shock batons abroad against government policy.

The organisations are questioning how the decision not to prosecute the two men – when another person featured in the programme was fined £5,000 in a Scottish court – could be in the "public interest" as the DPP claims.

The award-winning documentary, made by Martyn Gregory, exposed the continuing trade in potential torture weapons involving British firms. Earlier this year Amnesty International claimed that batons and other similar devices had been used for torture in up to 50 countries since 1990.

It is the first time that organisations representing the interests of torture victims abroad have been given the right to take legal action on their

behalf in a British court. The case is seen as important at a time when the Government has shown its commitment to an "ethical" foreign policy.

Another key element of the case is that both organisations are seeking what is called protective costs. This means an order from the judge that whoever wins the trial, each side will pay only their own expenses.

If successful, this could have enormous implications for similar actions by concerned bodies – who have no selfish interest in the outcome – to bring cases against authorities in the future.

At present, some organisations are deterred from bringing public interest cases, even if they feel they are likely to succeed, because of the risk of having to pay a massive bill if they lose against a public body.

At the judicial review hearing, expected early next year, Amnesty and Redress will also seek to establish for the first time that such disinterested groups can win a limit on the costs they have to bear.

Karen Ashton, of the Public Law Project, which is helping to bring the cases, said she saw it as an important test case on both the issue of public interest and the issue of costs.

"The questions are whether the judges have the power to make an order on protective costs, and whether they will in this case," she said. "It has implications on whether people can bring this kind of case in the future."

"Sometimes people can be deterred even if they feel they have a good case, because of the costs."

A spokeswoman for the DPP said very careful consideration had been given to the facts of the case before the decision not to prosecute.



Guard duty: Martin Healer and Anna Willoughby, two of the campaigners, at the camp set up to protect the Canbury Gardens poplars

Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

Eco-warriors rally to the sound of suburban protest

They come from different walks of life, but yesterday they met in common purpose to protect a row of poplar trees in a public park threatened with being cut down to make way for a housing development.

The well-heeled residents of Kingston upon Thames, southwest London, have been joined by seasoned eco-warriors of the Newbury bypass and Twyford Down disputes in the battle to save the trees.

The Liberal Democrat-run

council is due to go to the High Court in the near future to get an enforcement order, and the chainsaws are expected to be put into action afterwards. Yesterday's meeting was to plan contingencies for when that happened.

Peter Hitcham, a member of the residents' pressure group, Friends of Canbury Gardens, said: "We are very grateful for all the support we are getting, but we know we are up against the big battalions. We have a wide as-

sortment of people here, but we all have a common goal."

The poplars were planted in Thirties to shield Canbury Gardens from a power station which has since been demolished.

Developers Fairlough

Homes are building an estate of luxury flats and houses on the derelict land, and part of the agreement with the council is for the trees to be chopped down so that residents can have river views.

— Kim Sengupta

Rail privatisation has been a flop, say passengers

Rail privatisation is failing passengers, with 55 per cent saying the network is worse than it was a year ago, according to a survey out yesterday. Fewer than 6 per cent of the 2,000 passengers questioned said it had become easier to find a seat, according to the survey from the Railway Development Society. The survey found:

- Passengers were happiest with the Great Western and the Wales and West train companies, and least happy with Connex South Central, Regional Railways North East and the Great North Eastern Railway.
- Anglia had the highest increased satisfaction level, while satisfaction levels deteriorated the most for Regional Railways North East.
- GNER passengers had the most trouble finding a seat.

DAILY POEM

The Embankment (The Fantasia of a Fallen Gentleman on a Cold, Bitter Night)

By T E Hulme

Once, in finesse of fiddles found I ecstasy,
In a flash of gold heels on the hard pavement.
Now see I
That warmth's the very stuff of poesy.
Oh, God, make small
The old star-eaten blanket of the sky;
That I may fold it round me and in comfort lie.

This week's poems come from the seventh edition of *Poems on the Underground*, edited by Gerard Benson, Judith Charnalk and Cicely Herbert (Cassell, £12.99). Emulated around the world since its launch in 1986, *Poems on the Underground* now has counterparts on transport systems in cities from Moscow to Adelaide, as well as on the Internet.

Crew rescued as cargo ship founders in Channel

Thirty-two sailors were rescued last night after a listing cargo ship was abandoned in the English Channel.

The 20,000-ton Cypriot-registered *Rosa M* got into trouble off the coast at Barfleur, 15 miles north-east of Cherbourg, when its freight shifted, causing it to lurch dangerously.

The crew took life-rafts and were eventually winched to safety by British and French rescue helicopters. A passing merchant vessel, the *Melcri*, also gave assistance.

The ship was said to be listing heavily late last night, but had not yet capsized. Port authority tugs were hoping to tow it into port in the next few hours.

Clubber in 'ecstasy death'

A post-mortem examination is to be carried out today on a 28-year-old man who collapsed and died after apparently taking ecstasy.

The man, from Cambridge, had been out with friends at the White House Club in Newmarket, Suffolk, when he collapsed early yesterday. A police spokesman said: "At this stage we do not know what caused the death. We must, however, work on the assumption that drugs may have played a part."

Staff and clubgoers were being questioned in an effort to find out what happened. The coroner has been informed and an inquest will be held.

Patten backs princess's plea

The former Hong Kong governor Chris Patten yesterday backed the Princess Royal's call for the Royal Yacht *Briannia* to be scuttled – if it will save it from a "vulgar or naff" future.

Mr Patten told Sky News: "I think it would be a pity if, like previous royal yachts, it was broken up and sunk." But he added: "I think it would be disastrous – I would prefer to see it sunk – than used for anything which was vulgar or naff, so I hope a role can be found for her."

The Princess said last week that she would rather see it scuttled than preserved as a tourist attraction which could not be maintained.

£9.4m for lottery winner

One ticketholder scooped just over £9.4m in Saturday's National Lottery draw. A further 19 matched five numbers plus the bonus ball, winning £152,315 each. The winning numbers were: 2, 21, 47, 8, 46, and 29, with bonus ball: 28.



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7/ENVIRONMENT NEWS

rfare

Japan fears a bumpy ride on road to climate deal

Japan is desperate to make a success of the Kyoto world climate conference. It will be torn between its desire to present a green face and please its American allies.

Kyoto — Swashbuckling is not a word associated with Japanese ministers, but if any member of the present cabinet might earn the accolade, it would be Hiroshi Oki. In 1987, he was sent to the Philippines where a Japanese expatriate businessman had been taken hostage. In the past, such crimes have ended in bloodshed or humiliating ransoms. But Mr Oki avoided both and after an intense round of discreet diplomacy he returned to Japan a hero.

Ten years on, as Japan's environment minister, he begins the job today of chairing the UN environment conference on climate change. It is a task that makes negotiating with Filipino kidnappers look easy by comparison. The official name of this month's gathering is the Third Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change — and its name is one of the least complicated things about it.

Representatives of 160 UN member states over 10 days will try to reach an agreement on reducing greenhouse gases, principally carbon dioxide, which cause global warming.

And almost every participant in the conference is giving Mr Oki a headache. The EU wants a 15 per cent reduction from the 1990 level by 2015; Australia, a huge exporter of coal, wants no reduction. The United States, unwilling to compromise over "American lifestyles", tends to side with Australia, while the Al-

liance of Small Island States, fearful of rising seas and sinking coastlines, seeks the most radical adjustment of all. In the middle is Japan.

Apart from global warming, Japan has good reasons to want COP3 to be a big success. As an economic superpower, Japan is impatient for political responsibilities to match its wealth. Japanese troops are participating in overseas peacekeeping operations; Tokyo is pressing for a seal on the UN Security Council. After decades living down the disgrace of the Second World War, Japan aspires to be "a normal country", says the opposition leader Ichiro Ozawa, the kind that can

BY RICHARD LLOYD PARRY

show decisive leadership at a big international conference.

But Tokyo's record on decision-making is poor. When the international community asked it to help in the Gulf War, Tokyo took weeks of divisive debate to agree on its contribution, which turned out to consist only of a large cheque. Japanese decision-making works by consensus, achieved over long negotiations. With only 10 days until the end of COP3, and few signs of compromise by the participants, time is running out.

From the point of view of the environmentalists and more radical European participants, the omens are not good. Japan has moved closer to the American position, with a set of proposals that have become ever feebler as the conference approaches. Originally, Japan proposed a 5 per cent reduction in 1990 emission levels. Now that

is regarded as a "base reduction rate" in calculating "country by country reductions". It now turns out that Japan's actual quota reduction might be half a per cent. To be fair to Japan, the political system leaves the bureaucrats with little freedom of movement. Relations between politicians and big business are closer than in most industrialised democracies.

As an island nation with few natural resources of its own, perched on the edge of an unstable continent, the Japanese feel they are uniquely vulnerable over energy and the security of supplies. Japan is a wasteful country, with a poor record on recycling. The national mania for novelty means functional household appliances are routinely thrown out in favour of new ones.

However, as a producer of greenhouse gases, Japan's performance compares favourably with that of the United Kingdom: in 1994, per capita emissions of CO₂ were 2.43 tonnes compared with 2.58 in Britain.

The significant factor may be Japan's relationship with the United States, its military defender, biggest commercial market and closest ally. Japan has more to lose by upsetting Washington than by upsetting the Europeans. But the conference will only be a success if all sides are allowed some formula for claiming victory. That will be a struggle for Mr Oki.



Kyoto's city mayor, Yukio Hatoyama, yesterday leading a bicycle rally to appeal for environmental responsibility

Photograph: AP

Clinton shackled by barons of the energy industry

The United States can singlehandedly make or break the Kyoto conference on global warming. Mary Dejevsky in Washington warns that domestic constraints severely limit President Clinton's room for negotiation.

The official US position calls for stabilisation of greenhouse gas emissions world-wide at the 1990 level by the year 2012. This was the formula announced at a White House conference by Mr Clinton two months ago, and it has not been altered since, despite expressions of disappointment, especially from European leaders. The US would also support an international system for trading permits for greenhouse emissions.

Left to himself, Mr Clinton has indicated he would go much further. At the same White House conference, he accepted the case for global warming and said the US, as the biggest emitter of greenhouse gases - 25 per cent of global emissions for 4 per cent of the world population - should set an example.

His Vice-President, Al Gore, paraded his green credentials to advantage during the 1992 presidential election campaign, and his Environment Secretary, Bruce Babbitt, has been forthright in support of scientific groups that see global warming as the scourge of the future.

Yet neither Mr Gore nor Mr Babbitt will be going to Kyoto. Two weeks ago the man seen as the administration's truest believer in global warming, the Under-Secretary of State for Global Affairs, Tim Wirth, resigned. He is to oversee the \$1bn (£625m) gift from Ted Turner to the UN for environmental programmes. The word in Washington is that he felt US policy was hamstringing the demands of America's big energy-producers, and that he could do no more.

Now the US team will be led by Stuart Eizenstat, Under-Secretary of State, regarded as more even-handed on the greenhouse-gas issue than Mr Wirth - in other words, less like

ly to sign an agreement US industry will not like. Mr Gore, who was said last week still to be considering going to Kyoto, would travel only if the conference resulted in greenhouse gas targets he could accept and a diplomatic victory for the US. With his sights on the next presidential campaign, to be associated with anything less would be a liability.

In signing the US up to emissions targets at the level the Europeans are aiming for, the problems for Mr Clinton and Mr Gore are two: the might of the US energy sector - which is particularly defensive because of Mr Clinton's plans for deregulation - and an American public that fears a fall in living standards if the US is forced to become less profligate in its use of energy.

The energy industry has run a television advertising campaign designed to confirm Americans' worst fears about Kyoto. For the US to accept cuts in its own emissions, the commercials argue, could mean a 50 cent increase in the price of petrol. The punchline plays on a simplistic sense of justice: "It's not global, and it won't work." The inference is that less developed countries should make the same efforts as the developed countries - or else any treaty is meaningless.

Mr Clinton and his administration know that acceptance of this argument would be the quickest way to ensuring that there is no treaty at all. It would fuel Third World suspicions that the industrialised world just wants to retard their development and they would refuse to sign.

But the state of US public opinion may be more complex than the energy sector would like to believe. One poll for this week's issue of *Newsweek* magazine finds 63 per cent of Americans believe a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions need not damage the US economy. However, only a bare majority (51 per cent) said they would pay even 12c more for petrol. At least, the *Newsweek* poll suggests, a majority of Americans appreciate the advisability of appearing green in public. Whether they act on this is another matter.



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Swiss stop saying sorry for Nazi gold

The last chapter of the Holocaust should not descend into wrangling over money, says Thomas Borer, head of the Swiss delegation to this week's Nazi gold conference in London. He tells Louise Jury the world should recognise what Switzerland has done to make amends.

Thomas Borer believes Switzerland deserves credit. Though slow to recognise the heat of international criticism of its war-time role as bankers to the Nazis, the Swiss have, he insists, set the pace since their investigation and compensation.

Mr Borer hopes the 41-nation conference opening tomorrow will acknowledge their efforts. "We're always in a no-win situation. If we give out a cheque, it's too little, too late. If we publish the names of dormant account holders, people ask 'Why now?' We have to be cool. But I hope we will get a fair assessment."

The Nazis poured about £200m of gold into Switzerland during the Second World War. The Allies warned Berne early on that this could not have been obtained legally and must be plunder, but Switzerland thought, and continues to think, that it had to trade with the Nazis as well as the Allies because it was a neutral country.

The Swiss were shocked last year when newly-released details of this wartime trading triggered an international outcry about the morality of this neutral stance. Stung into action, Flavio Cotti, the Swiss

Foreign Minister, apologised and came up with the money.

Although Switzerland can afford to be generous (and did profit from the war), what it has done since the "Nazi gold" storm broke has been considerable. Two funds have been set up. The Swiss Fund for Needy Victims of the Holocaust was founded with donations from Switzerland's main banks, including the Swiss National Bank, and stands at 270 million Swiss francs (£117m). The first payments went to Holocaust survivors in Latvia this month.

The second, the seven billion Swiss franc (£3bn) Swiss Foundation for Solidarity, will fund annual awards to all victims of poverty and catastrophe.

In addition, Switzerland has suspended its notorious bank secrecy laws to help Holocaust survivors and their families reclaim deposits which were left in Swiss banks. Until now, many were unable to make claims because the necessary documentation was destroyed in the concentration camps or lost.

"We have tried to do the right thing," Mr Borer says. But he is exasperated and somewhat fearful that the London conference will continue to make Switzerland a scapegoat while other countries escape international opprobrium.

Gold and other Nazi assets were channelled through several countries, including Portugal, Spain, Sweden and several Latin American states. There is surprise and some disappointment in Switzerland that the Swiss alone are the targets of criticism.

A report on the activities of these other countries by Stuart Eizenstat, head of the American delegation, was due last month but has not been completed in time for the conference.

Mr Borer is unwilling to make public demands on other nations but says: "Madeleine Albright (the US Secretary of State) has clearly said that we have set the pace and we are, in a way, an example."

Some Jewish organisations still believe the Swiss could do more. Mr Borer says the World Jewish Congress has asked for as much as \$3bn. They will not get it.

"If we go on talking about money, the last chapter of the Holocaust is going to be about money," he says. That will do nothing to aid understanding of what happened in the war or promote links with the Jewish community. But in a gesture of good faith, he thinks Swiss banks may settle a group legal action by American Holocaust survivors against them out of court.

America is where the public image of Switzerland needs most attention. Several states, led by California, have suspended investment dealings with American subsidiaries of Swiss banks in the wake of the Nazi gold affair. Next week, Mr Borer will go to New York to try to persuade state officials to drop their boycott.

"I came to office a year ago. We made a lot of promises and we have lived up to them. If you ask if we're fast enough, nobody is ever fast enough, but we are satisfied with the progress we've made."

When 240 delegates and more journalists arrive at Lancaster House for the conference tomorrow, he will repeat this message. Yet he admits he is suspicious of the value of such a gathering. "We have to ask ourselves, What are these conferences for?"



Thomas Borer: 'We made a lot of promises and we have lived up to them'

Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

Assisi goes back on show

Part of the Basilica of St Francis in Assisi was opened to the public yesterday for the first time since earthquakes destroyed the priceless medieval frescoes on its vaulted ceilings two months ago.

Worshippers and tourists were allowed into the beautiful lower basilica where the body of St Francis is housed. "This is a sign of hope and joy," said Fr Nicola Giandomenico, spokesman for the Franciscan friars who live in the church complex.

"Hope, for all the careful work that's being done to restore the building in its entirety: joy, for the fact our Franciscan community has been able to resume a normal life, finding an important space for spirituality."

The lower part of the church, which is covered in frescoes that include works by the 13th-century master Giotto, was untouched by twin earthquakes on 26 September.

But the tremors, which wrought havoc across much of central Italy, brought down a ceiling in the upper church, killing four people and reducing paintings by Giotto's near-contemporary Cimabue to dust. Thousands of smaller tremors have hit the region since then and experts have warned that the cracks in the upper basilica could widen. The friars have said they hope to reopen the whole building in the year 2000.

— Reuters, Assisi

From dissident guru to plaster saint: sleaze scandal topples Czech leader

A scandal over political donations ended the career yesterday of Vaclav Klaus, one of the longest-serving dissident intellectuals in Central Europe. Imre Kuroc charts the rise and fall of the Czech Prime Minister and monetarist guru.



Vaclav Klaus: Economist seen as economical with the truth

In another time but in the same place, the story of the rise and fall of Vaclav Klaus might have inspired even the playwright Vaclav Havel. It is a parable of the corrosive influence of power, of over-reaching ambition and, finally, monumental failure.

Until yesterday, the two Vaclavs had been Eastern Europe's most successful double act. Mr Havel, spiritual leader of the "Velvet Revolution" still resides in Prague's Hradcany's palace as President. But Mr Klaus, who penned the revolutionaries' demands and delivered them to the Communist Party almost exactly eight years ago, is gone.

In 1989, hundreds of thousands of protesters rattled keys and roared in the streets as Mr Klaus was presenting his eviction notice. Late Saturday night, when his party was discussing Mr Klaus's future, his army of support had dwindled to about 500, and they did their idol no good by pouring a Coca Cola over the head of one of his rivals.

Mr Klaus was forced to emerge from the smoke-filled room where his crucifixion was taking place to quell his fans. "Thank you for your kind words. I appreciate it but it is starting to become counter-productive, with the shouting," he told them.

Shortly after midnight came the humiliating press conference, broadcast live

on television. "I do not think it would be productive for this government to go on, and naturally it is out of the question for me to seek any kind of important position in the government to come," he announced.

The outgoing prime minister salvaged his position as head of the Civic Democratic Party, his own creation. But even that is in jeopardy, as a hurriedly convened party congress two weeks from now is unlikely to rubber-stamp that role.

Ostensibly, the former economics professor is quitting because he is seen to have been economical with the truth. Mr Klaus is caught up in the middle of a scandal over donations.

The affair goes back to November 1995, when a cheque for 7.5 million crowns (£130,000) was deposited in his party's coffers.

The mysterious donation was originally attributed to a Hungarian who, it turned out, had been dead for 12 years, and to a man from Mauritius who had never heard of Mr Klaus's party.

Only recently was the true source revealed. The benefactor turns out to have been Milan Stejber, a Czech tennis player turned businessman and proud owner of the country's third-largest steelworks, which was bought from Mr Klaus's government at a very advantageous price. Now there is a coincidence.

Mr Klaus claims to have known nothing of the affair. But his party deputy, Josef Zeleniec, resigned in protest at the end of October as foreign minister, and claimed last week that Mr Klaus had known about the donation earlier than he let on.

There is, of course, probably not a single party in Eastern Europe untainted by sleaze. The new masters of the emerging democracies have in most places turned out to have as sticky fingers as their predecessors. Nor is Mr Klaus the only man standing accused in the Czech scandal. But the 56-year-old monetarist professor who once lectured Margaret Thatcher on Thatcherism was expected to set a better example.

His worst failing, and true cause of his demise, has more to do with economics than morality. Mr Klaus's shock therapy brought spectacular success in the early years, but recently ran into trouble. A currency crisis earlier this year exposed weaknesses, persuading foreign fund managers that places like Warsaw and Budapest, where leaders had shunned Mr Klaus's monetarist dogma, were safer investment bets.

Spanish banking supremo on trial

The former banking supremo Mario Conde, once the glamorous darling of new Spain, goes on trial today charged with fraud and embezzlement on a mind-boggling scale. He could be sent down for more than 35 years.

Sacked in 1993 as boss of one of country's oldest and grandest banks, Mr Conde has consistently denied responsibility for Banesto's "black hole" of £3bn. Now widely regarded as a brilliant but unscrupulous manipulator, Mr Conde claims that his political opponents cast him as the "black sheep" of Spanish banking.

The scandal at the end of Spain's boom years unleashed a spectacular financial crisis, and the huge operation which had to be mounted in order to rescue Banesto convulsed Spain's banking system. Mr Conde, 49, and nine senior associates, are accused of enriching themselves by defrauding Banesto's shareholders of about £40m through his six years as chairman.

During that time, Mr Conde, the son of small-town customs inspector, accumulated a personal fortune put at some £35m, some of it invested in a number of houses and vast country estates, the rest, the prosecution says, squirrelled away in a web of Swiss money-laundering operations.

Mr Conde emerged this week from years of silence to launch a charm offensive. "The intervention of Banesto [by the Bank of Spain] was strictly political," he told every newspaper and television station in Spain.

"The Socialist government of Felipe González used all the powers of the state to make me the baddie."

The judges will investigate seven irregular operations which occurred while Mr Conde was at Banesto. In these, he allegedly took money from the till and acquired a number of trading outfits which he subjected to what the prosecution calls "financial engineering and creative accounting ... that constituted a smokescreen of trickery."

— Elizabeth Nash, Madrid

Four lost in sea tragedy

Four people were feared dead when a Danish fishing boat and a Norwegian tanker collided in fog in the Oresund strait between Denmark and Sweden.

Coastguards and police said 20 people had been brought ashore from the accident, south of Hven Island in the strait, and divers were sent down. A spokesman for Danish coastguards said the Danish vessel, the *Peder Winde*, sank shortly after the collision with the Norwegian gas tanker *Clipper Skagen*, which appeared to be undamaged.

— Reuters, Copenhagen

Playing a part for peace

For the first time since the outbreak of the Bosnian war, a Sarajevo theatrical ensemble visited Serbia-Yugoslavia with a performance that received standing ovations.

The Obala troupe, a mix of Bosnia's ethnic groups - Muslim, Serb and Croat - played Strindberg's *Miss Julie* to a packed audience in the Serbian capital. "The atmosphere was rife with all the emotion throughout the play," said a Belgrade reporter, Maja Milic. The actor-director Sverzar Cvetkovic, from the host theatre, Atelje 212, said it was a "unique catharsis the actors and the audience went through".

— AP, Belgrade

Prodi tested in local polls

Italians voted in local elections in which the centre-left coalition of the Prime Minister, Romano Prodi, was expected to consolidate gains made in first-round balloting two weeks ago.

They are another test of confidence in Mr Prodi's budgetary policies, designed to secure Italy's place in the European single currency. Votes were being cast for the mayors of 43 communal councils, with the key fight in Genoa, which Mr Prodi's Olive Tree coalition failed to take first time round.

Kohl seeks aid for Moscow

The German Chancellor, Helmut Kohl, said he and President Boris Yeltsin had discussed prospects for Russia getting new financial assistance and that he would raise the issue with global leaders.

"I will consult ... other countries," Mr Kohl said after their talks outside Moscow. Russian officials, worried by big withdrawals from its financial markets, flew to Washington last week for talks with the IMF but details have not been made public.

— Reuters, Moscow

Hungarians to see red

The Hungarian government has approved draft legislation to deal with growing prostitution by setting up red-light districts throughout the country.

The bill is designed to protect the public and attempt to separate prostitutes from organised crime, as it would impose heavy fines on those exploiting sex workers.

— AP, Hungary

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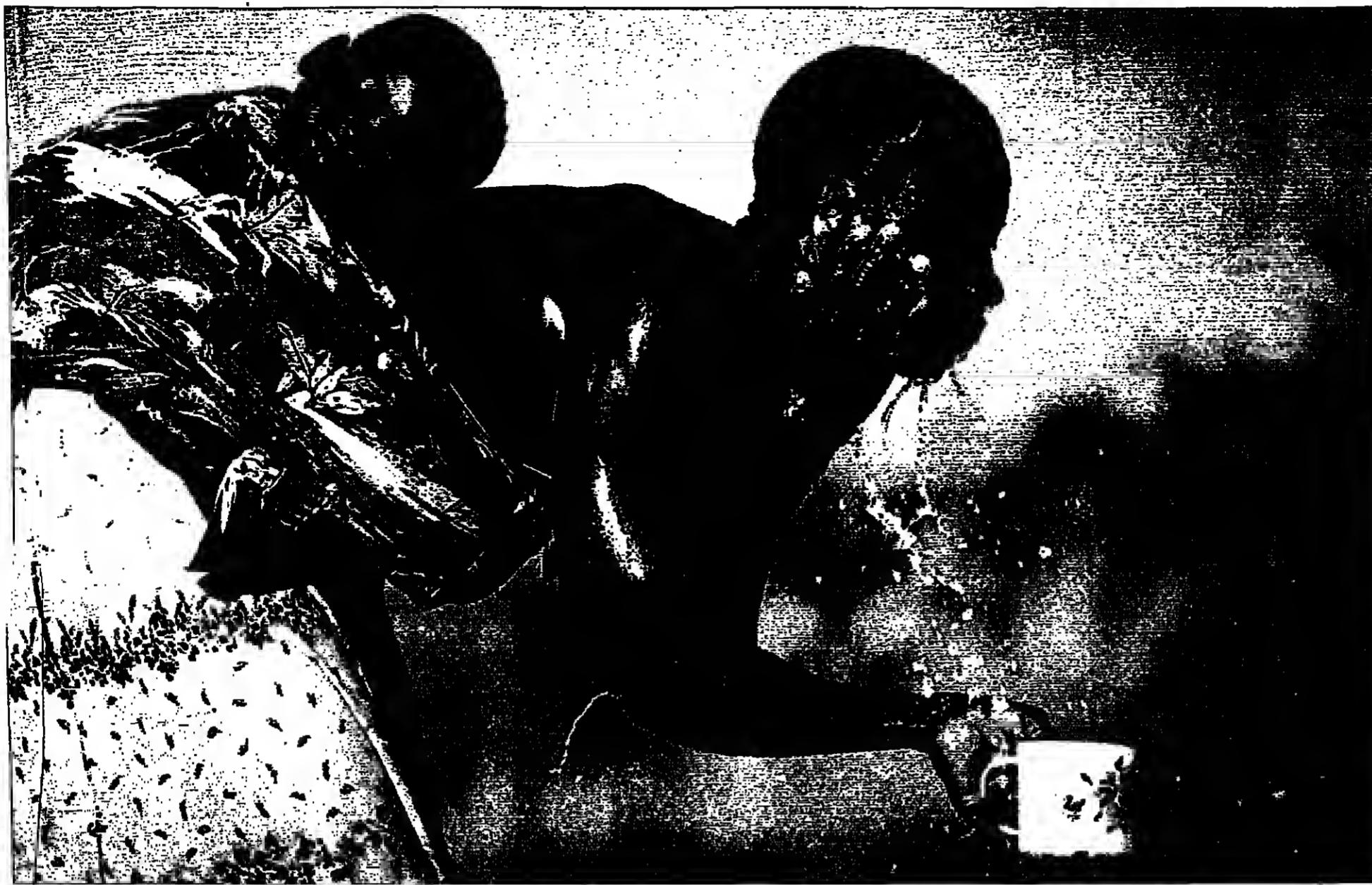
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Their low status means that many African women have little control over their lives, or their bodies. Men have numerous partners, allowing Aids to spread easily. Photograph: Jodi Bieber

War-ravaged land haunted by spectre of Aids

Aids may have lost some of its sting in the West, but it casts a lengthening shadow over Africa. *Mary* raid in central Mozambique watches an epidemic unfold.

In the shade of the village mango tree, near Morumbala in central Mozambique, more than 30 children, some as young as eight, have dissolved into giggles.

In the mid-day heat, Amelia Zeca, their teacher, is struggling to roll a condom over a chewed corn husk. When the rubber rips, she turns her attention to the arm of a chair. By then, the village headman monitoring this culturally-sensitive sex education experiment, and a host of parents watching from the shade of another tree, are also smiling.

"Does everyone know about Sida [Aids in Portuguese]?" Ms Zeca asks. The laughter subsides. She drills them in ways the HIV virus can be contacted. "Does anyone want to die?" she asks. "No" the children chorus, no one wants to die.

This village, like every other in Zambezia province, is struggling to stitch itself back together following the country's 17-year civil

war. Just a few years ago, the area was deserted. Millions fled across the border to Malawi to escape the fighting between Mozambique's Frelimo government and South African-backed Renamo rebels. Houses were razed and villages massacred. Millions died until neither side had the energy to slug it out any more.

After peace was brokered in 1992, the refugees streamed back from Malawi. The past echoes in the mortared buildings and the fenced-off mine fields along the verges of the few pitted, surface-stripped roads. The war bankrupted Mozambique, but its economy is showing signs of recovery and in Zambezia's rural mud settlements and small towns, communities seem to be kick-starting.

But all these precious signs of progress are threatened by a new enemy: Aids. The disease in Mozambique is most advanced in Zambezia. The refugees carried it back there from Malawi, which boasts one of the worst rates of HIV infection in sub-Saharan Africa.

New United Nations statistics, released to coincide with World Aids Day today, show that of the 30.6 million people in the world who are now thought to be HIV-positive, a shocking two-thirds are in Africa.

In the West, education, good health care and the discovery of expensive, life-prolonging combination therapies have robbed the virus of some of its sting.

In Africa by contrast, Aids is claiming victims at breathtaking speed, ploughing through countries whose populations are too worn out to offer much resistance to the disease. Charities such as Save the Children, sponsors of the village sex education scheme, are battling against enormous odds.

Apart from poverty, the disease in Mozambique can count off factors such as the low status of women and children to aid its advance. As we crawl in our car along crumbling roads, Etelvina da Cuhna, Save The Children's local project director, points out child mothers as young as 12illing the soil in the nearby fields with their babies on their backs.

"In towns, men usually have two or three wives and in rural areas as many as six," she says. "Girls marry as young as 10 often to much older men. Three out of 10 girls are married before they reach the age of 12."

Ms da Cuhna dispenses condoms in the villages as we tour the district. The men look unimpressed. Some believe "Sida" is a gov-

ernment conspiracy to curb their traditional polygamy. Those who do accept the condoms do not always use them for their proper purpose. In some villages we see boys kicking footballs made of blown-up condoms, rope and banana leaves.

The men have girlfriends and prostitution is widespread. Ironically, the post-war recovery is helping to spread HIV infection. Morumbala is again teeming with people and the local brothel does a roaring trade. Every week a lorry arrives in town to pick up "used" women and deposit another consignment of girls.

The presence of international charities drew one local girl called Anna, 25, to Morumbala. She found work with the UN High Commissioner for Refugees. But it would take a couple of years ago, and the Italian aid worker she was living with returned to his wife. Now she now trawls the bars. If not, she does not eat. It is the fate of so many local women. "There is no other work," she says. Competition for clients is fierce, but she still sympathises with her rivals. Girls as young as 10 work the bars just to go to school. "They swap sex for money for exercise books" she says. "I really feel for them." Like her they seldom use condoms because most of their clients refuse.

The pieces are all in place for a terrible epidemic. Sexually transmitted diseases are widespread and largely untreated (increasing vulnerability to HIV). There are no reliable statistics but local Aids workers reckon the HIV infection rate among pregnant women is around 25 per cent.

That the focal health services are ill-equipped for the crisis is an understatement. Malaria and other diseases which long ago ceased to trouble the West have them beaten. Morumbala has just witnessed an outbreak of bubonic plague. "There are no needles, no aspirin, no antibiotics," says one doctor, who does not want to be named, "except when an official visits."

In the face of such a bleak reality, Save The Children believes the only hope is to target the next generation as early as possible. Their controversial sex education pilot only started after they had convinced parents that their children not only knew about sex but were sexually active.

Even with education, the children who chant about Sida beneath the tree face heavy odds. The social standing of women is unlikely to improve unless the economy takes off. Until then, girls and women will not have the luxury of choice or the power to insist on a condom.

Israel's handover scorned

Israel's cabinet yesterday approved in principle the handover of more West Bank land to the Palestinians, but did not decide on the scope or timing of the pullback.

Under the Oslo accords, Israel is committed to a three-stage withdrawal, which is intended to end the Israeli occupation of most of the West Bank, which it captured in 1967.

But Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister, has made it clear that he does not intend to relinquish much more than one-third of the West Bank, and in the next phase he is unlikely to hand over to the Palestinian Authority more than 6 to 8 per cent of the West Bank, rather than the 20 to 25 per cent it expects.

Mr Netanyahu is also demanding a "systematic" clampdown on Hamas, the Islamic militants, by Yasser Arafat, the Palestinian leader, and the acceleration of final status talks on relations between Israel and the Palestinians. Then the redeployment can begin. The Palestinians, and increasingly the Americans, see these demands as excuses not to implement the Oslo accords.

Washington is putting pressure on Israel to negotiate seriously in the light of the continuing crisis over Iraq. The Americans believe Mr Netanyahu's intransigence is undermining their position in the Arab world. In a letter to two Jewish leaders in the US, Madeleine Albright, the US Secretary of State, wrote that "the reality which we deal with is that when the peace process between Israel and the Arabs is deadlocked, our influence in the region is harmed".

"The Israeli government is actually conducting negotiations with itself," said Hanan Ashrawi, a Palestinian cabinet member yesterday. "The Israelis say they want to conduct negotiations with the Palestinians - but basically there is already a signed agreement pertaining to redeployment, and a timetable for that redeployment. So I don't believe this is the time to start devising agreements."

It is not clear if Mr Netanyahu has any intention of implementing the Oslo accords. Hanan Shalev, an Israeli commentator, says no one - Palestinians, Americans or members of his own cabinet, "knows whether to believe what Netanyahu is saying, and nobody knows where he is really heading".

The Israeli leader made it politically impossible for Mr Arafat to clamp down on Hamas when he released Sheikh Ahmed Yassin, the Hamas leader, from jail in return for the freeing of two Israeli agents captured in Jordan on a mission to assassinate a Hamas official. Mr Netanyahu is also under pressure from the extreme right not to pull back further from the West Bank.

— Patrick Cockburn, Jerusalem

French hostage in Tajikistan killed after rescue is botched

Hostage-taking in Tajikistan yesterday claimed the life of a French air worker. Phil Reeves in Moscow says the violence in the former Soviet republic worries the West oil men as well as the Kremlin.

A French hostage in Tajikistan died yesterday after a disastrous rescue operation in which heavily armed government troops stormed the hide-out in which she was imprisoned. Her death is a setback for the Central Asian nation which had been trying to prove to the world that, after four years of civil war, it was making headway in its efforts to restore stability by clamping down on a rash of abductions.

An air raid was last night heading from France's little capital, Dushanbe, to pick up the body of Karine Mane, who worked for an organisation funded by the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR. There were conflicting reports about what happened in the fatal operation, although clearly went badly wrong. According to Reuters, local residents said it began when a government tank drove into the courtyard of the house in which

she was imprisoned, and rammed it.

Although this was not officially confirmed, the Tajik foreign ministry admitted government forces attacked the building. Another official said five of Mr Mane's guards walked out into the courtyard shouting "Allah Akbar" ("God is Great") and blew themselves up with a grenade, which badly injured her.

Her death came a day after her partner, Frank Janier-Duhay, an official with the EU's Tacis programme, was released. The two were abducted nearly a fortnight ago in what appears to have been the latest round in a feud between the Taliban in Afghanistan.

The region is also important to the United States and others keen to exploit the vast oil and gas reserves in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, and to choke off a flood of narcotics from the region.

For similar strategic reasons, Iran is keenly interested in its smaller neighbour.

The players in this power game are not finding it easy to impose their will. When the two French were abducted on 18 November, the US embassy in Dushanbe advised Americans to leave the country, adding - with unusual bluntness - that the Tajik government had failed to demonstrate that it had the capacity to protect foreign nationals. Yesterday it sought to do so, with tragic consequences.

Poll shock for Taiwan

A breakthrough in local elections by Taiwan's main opposition Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) could signal the end of half a century of one-party rule by the (KMT), which ruled the Chinese mainland in 1949 when its leaders fled to Taiwan.

The DPP victory shocked the Kuomintang and will irk Peking, as it dislikes the opposition's commitment to independence for Taiwan. The DPP's triumph in Saturday's election for mayors and county magistrates was largely the result of a strategy which underplayed its pro-independence platform, stressing a commitment to clean government.

Under the leadership of the former dissident Hsu Hsin-tiang, the DPP has transformed itself, neutralising radicals and pushing the organisation into the mainstream. The strategy secured a majority of the popular vote for the DPP for the first time and gave it control of municipalities housing 72 per cent of the population.

Yesterday leaders said they expected victory in next year's national elections. The KMT made no effort to hide the scale of its defeat.

Mr Hsu is keen to pursue negotiations for a coalition government with the KMT to give party members experience of government and establish their credentials as a credible alternative.

— Stephen Vines, Hong Kong

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Mugabe lashed by old enemy

Zimbabwe's last white leader, Ian Smith, yesterday dismissed President Robert Mugabe's planned land-grab as politicking and said if he did seize white farms it could destroy the economy.

"Mugabe won't go ahead with his plans as they are now. The most important thing for him now is to win support and votes," Mr Smith said.

Mr Mugabe's government has included a part of a farm owned by Mr Smith, white Rhodesia's last prime minister, among 1,503 land parcels it plans to seize for redistribution to black peasants.

— Reuters, South Africa

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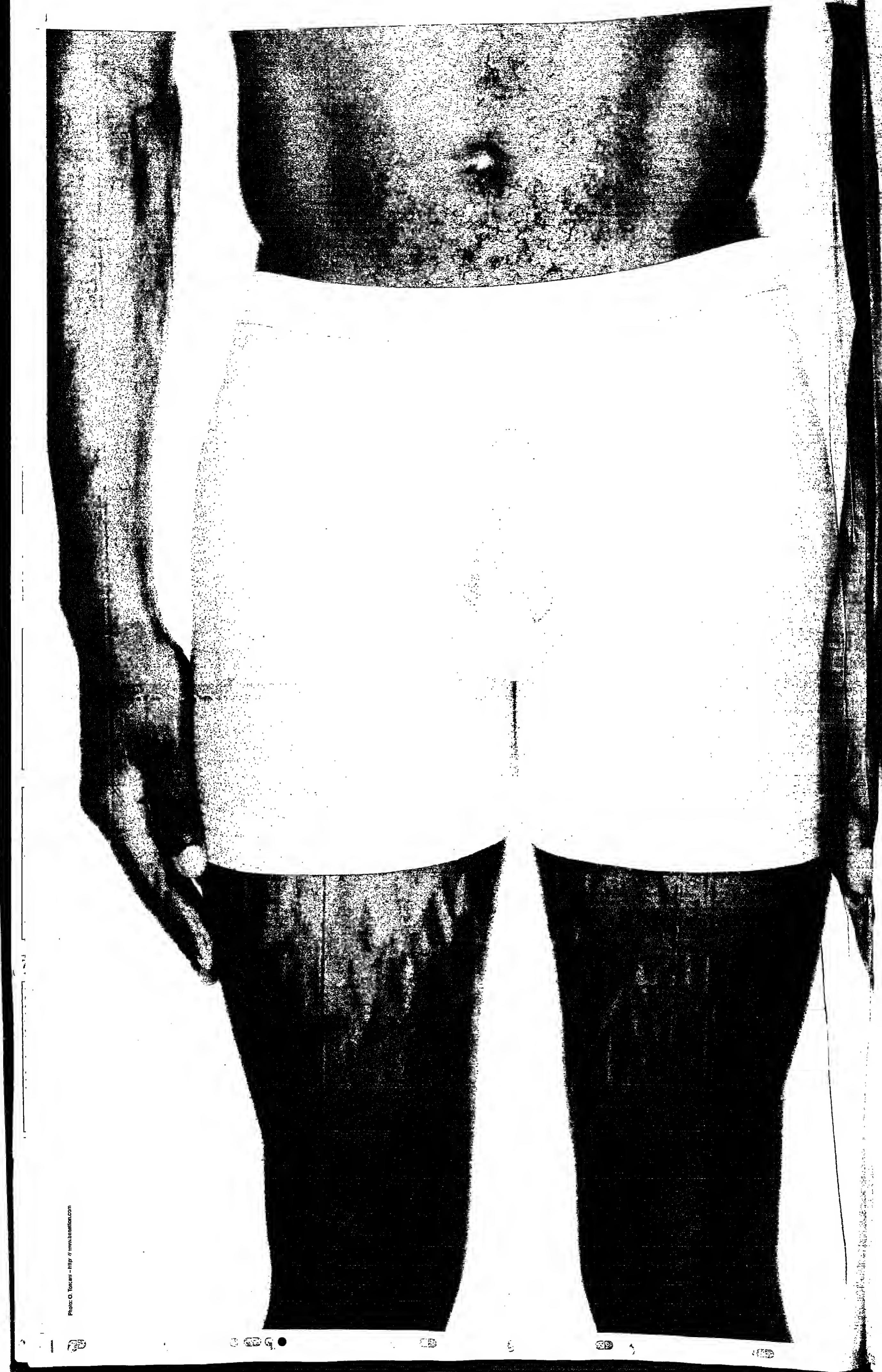
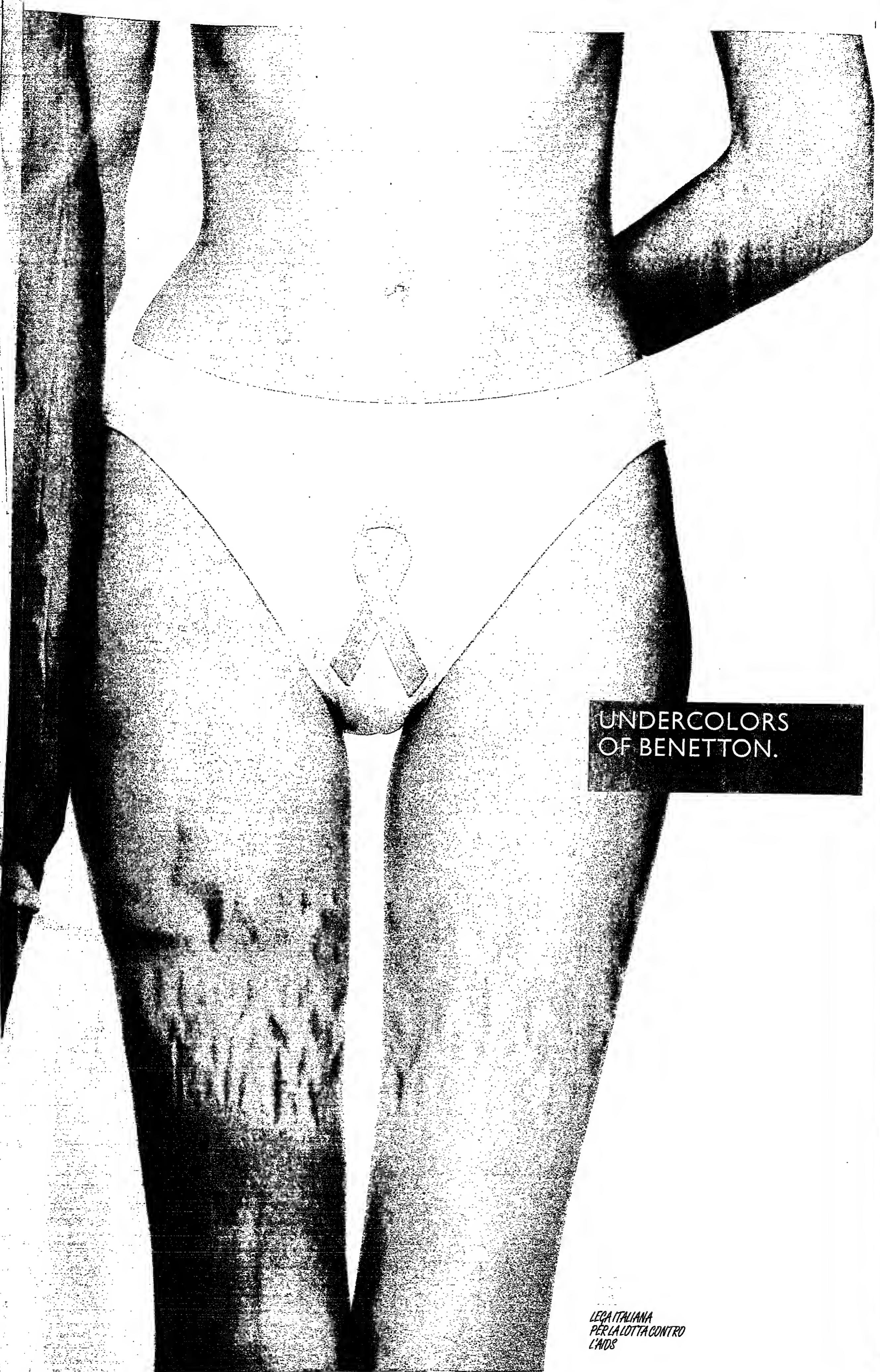


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LEGA ITALIANA
PER LA LOTTA CONTRO
L'AIDS

12/LEADER & LETTERS

Museum charges will always be too high a price to pay



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Minimum wage

Sir: Your leader of 28 November rightly recognised that the "principle of the minimum wage is simple and it is right". All sectors of business also support the principle of the minimum wage.

However it is wrong to think that the Low Pay Commission can come up with a figure by Christmas and the Government can introduce it in the New Year.

A minimum wage was a manifesto promise. We have set up the Low Pay Commission within 90 days of the election and legislation is in the first session of this Labour government. This will enable the minimum wage to be introduced as quickly as practicable.

But the Commission need time to consult widely with business and workers. They have written to over 600 organisations and are nearly half way through a national fact-finding tour. The commissioners must then consider all the evidence to reach informed recommendations on the rate, components and scope of the minimum wage.

That is why the Bill we have introduced doesn't contain a figure for the wage or spell out whether there will be different rates for those aged 16-25. To do so would prejudice the decisions of the commission. They are not "loopholes".

What we have made clear in the legislation is that there will be a single rate which will apply to all regions, sectors and size of firms. This will make the minimum wage as simple and as universal as possible.

For almost 30 years there has been a campaign for a national minimum wage and within six months of the return of a Labour government that wait is almost over.

IAN McCARTNEY
Minister of State
Department of Trade and
Industry
London SW1

Sir: Young people will be appalled by proposals to exempt them from the minimum wage ("Loophole may leave young workers unprotected by low pay law", 28 November).

In 1995, 16-24 year olds accounted for one in three of those earning £2.50 per hour or less. From 1985 to 1995 average pay for young people fell by up to 12 per cent of the na-

"If you wish to continue to look at this painting, please insert another compulsory donation token." Can the day be far off when our museums and art galleries are cordoned off from the rest of public space and charges introduced across the board? The Government will make a statement in the next 10 days, and no doubt it will be a carefully-balanced compromise between the "tough choices" imposed by public spending limits and the Labour Party's desire, expressed rather more passionately in opposition than in power, to keep museums and galleries free.

That will be a shame, because this is really an either/or decision. Either this country continues to glory in a series of great national art and cultural collections into which citizens can walk on a whim, in their lunch breaks or in between shopping. Or it slips and slides into a state of affairs in which "culture" is seen as a segmented economic activity, marked off, labelled as elite and paid for. This would be

a stifling and posthumous legacy of Thatcherite philistinism, and it would be grimly fitting that one of the engines of such a decline turned out to be the National Lottery. As we report today, the lottery, far from being the bottomless cornucopia calling for a revival of British culture, has turned out to be one of its chief enemies, by so distorting the financing of the larger museums and galleries.

According to the report from the Policy Studies Institute, the lottery has distracted curators from their core functions, including making their collections accessible, by encouraging grand capital projects which will require a source of revenue in future to maintain. This is an important extra pressure for charges to be introduced. In addition, lottery money has been drawn to the biggest and most famous institutions, many in London, thus dragging us further from the ideal of a proud, independent museum and gallery in every big city.

Yes, of course this is an elitist issue. Many cultural institutions already charge. The Science and Natural History Museums in London are not cheap. You have to pay to go to the theatre or listen to a concert. Why are the fine arts and provincial museums different? Well, they are different because as communities – or municipalities as they were called then – we recognised that we all gained from them, even if we personally never understood why a photograph would not be a better likeness, or why we could not read about the Rosetta stone in a book.

And in a way this is a small issue. The sums of money are relatively trivial in relation to the national budget. Education, health, pensioners and lone parents are all in greater need. But unless it is seen, one and a half steps back from the small print of the Treasury Red Book as a big issue, it will go by default.

Because it is a question of the kind of society modern – even millennial – Britain

is. Amid all the brave talk of a young, rebranded country, there are two possible models of the future. In one, we simply embrace entrepreneurs, big business and the dynamism of the private sector and seek to recruit them to social causes. Museums can stay free if they find sponsors to pick up the tab. Or, in the other future, we retain a role for the collectivity of citizens, a sense of civic pride, and a map of civic space. We say that the Victorians were right to aim for an elevated public culture and to mobilise collective resources for it. Indeed, side by side with the growth of Thatcherite free-market dynamism we have seen something of a renaissance in the architecture of public spaces over the Eighties: the question is whether this can be developed and promoted before it is swallowed up by a concept of the public good that is simply the aggregation of the prices that individuals are prepared to pay.

It is a good thing that museums and galleries have become much more commer-

cial and have raised huge sums of money from sponsorship. But the commercial imperative should not carry all before it. We should make some large declarations about our society – that we want to live in the sort of country where really good art and artefacts can be seen without charge. Where public spaces, including streets, shopping centres and train stations, should be safe and pleasant places for all the people.

Compromise is not possible. This newspaper last week pointed out that museum charges would deter people from just popping in if they could steal a quarter-hour to see a particular exhibit or simply be ready to be surprised by what is there. A correspondent suggested that charges could be set like car parks according to the amount of time spent. But that does not meet the objection. Free museums and galleries should be an indivisible part of our public life, and the Government should say so.

LETTERS



Museum charges

Sir: For the directors of the Natural History Museum and three other museums to assert (letter, 29 November) that there is no statistical evidence to support the view that admission charges deter visitors, and that the figures quoted in David Lister's report are "fictional", impugns officers of their own museums.

The figures quoted in our survey were checked and counter-checked with all national museums, with figures reported by successive governments and in the House of Commons this year. There may well be a margin of error in estimating visitor numbers without a ticketing system, but it is as likely to be under as over in any system dependent on the eye and hand. The fact remains that only now, when it is convenient for their argument, do the directors damn it.

The Earl of CLANCARTY
Lord FREYBERG
House of Lords

Carbon trading

Sir: I agree with Professor Peter F. Smith's carbon-based approach to our addiction (Letters, 26 November). An approach which gives me the same right to pollute you as for you to pollute me is the only fair way forward.

By issuing an equal number of pollution credits to each man, woman and child, without which it was impossible to buy fuel,

there would be more pressure to decide whether, for instance, to squander them on gas-guzzlers or economise with car-pooling.

Furthermore, if trading of those credits were allowed and if they were not issued directly to businesses, the latter would have to buy their credits via the open market and I could, for instance, choose to swap my credits for a bus or train pass and know that the road-space I was vacating would not simply be grabbed by another car-driver who could afford to pollute me more than I could him, or by a lorry whose

owner was simply passing on road charges to his customers.

By wiping the slate clean at the year-end and issuing another year's worth of credits based on the previous year's actual national fuel consumption, individuals who decided not to use all their credits would know they were helping to achieve a real reduction of pollution.

TERRY HORSNELL
Cambridge

Sir: Global warming is a fact, with plenty of climatic evidence to back it up in recent years. However, we should beware of rushing to put all the blame on human causes such as the burning of fossil fuels. The Earth has experienced warmer climates and higher levels of carbon dioxide in previous ages.

It is quite possible that general changes in temperature are caused by variations in the power output of the Sun, which are not yet sufficiently understood or accurately measured. Dr Maric's comparison with Venus (le-

ter, 28 November) fails to mention that the dire condition of that planet is due to its receiving twice as much heat from the Sun as does the Earth.

While it is highly desirable that atmospheric quality should be improved by cutting man-made emissions, we should not assume that this would also lead to a reduction in the rate of global warming.

SAM BOOTE
Keyworth, Nottinghamshire

of our needs. In the circumstances, an association between North American wheat and asthma seems highly unlikely, though we would naturally be interested to see the evidence.

JOHN MURRAY
Director General
National Association of British
and Irish Millers
London SW1

Mourning Hitler

Sir: William Long mentions the fact that Eamon de Valera visited the German embassy on 2 May 1945 to offer his condolences on the death of Hitler (Letters, 28 November). De Valera's action on that day was purely political and reinforced his determination to preserve Eire's proclaimed neutrality to the bitter end, even though he was fully aware of what the consequences of his gesture might be. A patriot de Valera was, a Nazi sympathiser he wasn't.

PHILIP O'REILLY
Birmingham

American wheat

Sir: In reply to Maya Kraus (Letters, 25 November), I have no wish to become embroiled in the rights and wrongs of the proposed Food Standards Agency handling both food safety and nutrition. However, your readers should be aware that British flour and bread is made predominantly from British and other European wheat. Usage of North American wheat is a tenth of its level 25 years ago, accounting for only 6 per cent

Millennium dawn

Sir: The International Date Line was established by the International Meridian Conference of 1884. At that time the people of Kiribati had had limited contact with the outside world and operated to an entirely different system of time from the 24-hour clock. European time was introduced when we were declared to be the British protectorate of the Gilbert and Ellice Islands in 1892.

When Kiribati again became independent in 1979, we inherited a situation where different parts of the country were operating in different days. The action of President Tito's government to remove that nonsense was motivated by the desire to unify our country and its administration. We resent the implication that this move was a cynical bid for tourist money ("South Sea islands fight for first place in millennial dawn", 28 November).

In fact, Caroline Island is not inhabited, and has no roads, airports, wharves, nor even much fresh water. While we shall welcome those who choose to celebrate the millennium dawn there, it will be very much a case of "bring your own infrastructure" – including sea transport to get there.

Our own people's celebration of the new millennium will take place on Kiribati (Christmas Island), which does have suitable infrastructure. President Tito has invited anyone who wishes to celebrate with us but as there are fewer than 100 hotel rooms, our visitors must be prepared to accept the traditional hospitality of the I Kiribati Maneaba (meeting house), rather than that of a tourist trap. I certainly hope to celebrate the millennium dawn there, some eighty minutes in advance of those on Mount Hapeka.

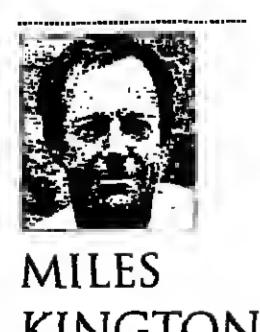
MICHAEL WALSH
Honorary Consul, Republic of
Kiribati
Llanddewi Rhydderch,
Monmouthshire

Jesus the surveyor

Sir: Whether Jesus was a carpenter or a chartered surveyor we shall probably never know (Column One, 28 November), but the latter view would give a whole new meaning to the immortal hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross".

DR ALLAN DODDS
Nottingham

A game of two halves with football's first agony aunt



MILES
KINGTON

I am glad to welcome today the very first football agony aunt in any national newspaper, Aunt Ron Bagshaw. Ron played football for most of the teams in today's Football League, and was variously known as the Hard Man of Hull, the Pele of Peterborough and the Nancy Boy of Notts County.

He has seen football in all its varying moods, known the agony and the ecstasy, had it all to do, faced an uphill struggle in the second half, been sent off, been sent on, and now, as he hangs his boots up, is knackered. But his heart is still in the game he loves, and he has decided to become an apologist for the vagaries of this wonderful game.

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Just a moment – just a moment! What's this about apologising? I havn't nothing to apologise for in my days as a footballer. Well, the occasional tackle when I went in a bit hard, yes, and broke a few limbs and put a stop

to a few carcers, yes, but nothing else – I mean, football can hold its head up high among the sports of the world without saying sorry for anything! It made a man out of me and...

No, I wasn't asking you to apologise for anything. An apologist is not someone who apologises – it's someone who defends.

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Oh, yeah?

Look, I was in the game all of 30 years and I never heard any of the back four being referred to as apologists. "The strikers were on target but the apologists gave all away" – did you ever hear anyone say that?

No I didn't mean that an apologist was a defender in the footballing sense...

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Is there another sense?

Well, yes, there is. I mean, someone who stands up for an idea is an apologist for that idea. For instance, Cardinal Newman, when he wrote his life story, called it

'Apologia Pro Vita Sua', which was a Latin phrase meaning, 'Apologia for His Life', but he wasn't apologising for anything. Far from it.

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Who did he play for?

Well, he started with Oxford but went over to Rome later on.

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Shrewd move, I played for Oxford for a little while at the time it was owned by Robert Maxwell, and I didn't enjoy it much. If I had had an offer from Rome I'd have snapp'd it up like a shot.

That's interesting – what was it like playing for Robert Maxwell?

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Much the same as playing for any big fat bloated uncouth dodgy businessman with bad breath, an overhanging ego like a heifer belly and on taste in dress.

Good heavens. Are there many such people in the Football League?

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Yes, quite a lot. In fact, by a coincidence it's exactly the same number as the number of clubs in the League. Each club has got one like that. He's called the chairman. But Robert Maxwell was a little bit different.

Why?

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Well, he was mad.

I mean, apart from that.

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Well, he was the only club chairman I ever met who came to home matches with two fat lawyers. He would wander up and down the touchline listening to the players, and the fans, shouting their usual obscenities, and as soon as he heard somebody shout something actionable he would slap a helmet on them, there and then.

Good heavens. Did he ever win any of these actions?

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: Well, no, not really. The thing was, you see, that some-

thing actionable shouted at a football match is not legal, it's slander. It's very difficult to prove that something has been shouted at a football match unless it is written down or video-recorded, so almost all these cases were dropped. I can remember once when an opposition player shouted at me, "You can't play any better than the fat fraud who pays you!" and Maxwell rushed on the pitch holding pen and paper and shouting, "Write that down, write that down, I dare you!"

And what happened?

Aunt Ron Bagshaw writes: He was sent off. Well, I am afraid that Aunt Ron Bagshaw didn't get the chance to answer all of your emotional problems in his opening as football's one and only agony aunt, but I think you'll agree that it was an enthralling no-score draw! He'll be back again soon, so keep those agonising dilemmas rolling in!

Welfare to work: the gamble that has to pay off



POLLY
TOYNBEE
BENEFITS OUT,
INCENTIVES IN

The row about the cut in benefits for lone parents is serious. It goes right to the heart of the Government's priorities. Until now, welfare to work has been something everyone could support; it has been all up-side with no pain for anyone. It has been all extra money to help people back to work with no cuts or sacrifices.

But the crunch has come over lone parents. Should the Government spend £400m restoring the cut the Tories made for all new claimants, or should the money he spent instead on a New Deal programme to get lone parents back to work, plus a huge expansion in after-school clubs to make that possible?

Both, say Labour's backbench rebels — most of whom think the Government was wrong to opt for extreme pain in the first two years in power, with more spending only later years. On one issue or another, this was bound to come to a head.

However, this was not a very hard choice for the Chancellor, for he is plainly not averse to sending out American-style signals that a life on welfare is no longer an option. It is becoming increasingly clear that he and Harriet Harman intend to get almost every able-bodied person now living on social security into a job of some kind. They wouldn't have chosen to pick on lone parents benefits, but if it was a choice between that and more childcare, it was an easy decision. As it is, it looks as if the New Deal is such a success there's a danger that its evaluation system will be wrecked; in the control areas where there is no New Deal, lone parents have heard of it and are demanding help in getting jobs, upsetting the statistical calculations of its effects.

The Chancellor is gambling everything on welfare to work. This is just the first hard choice in his mission to save self-perpetuating workless ghettoes — the Government's most important and admirable endeavour. Critics dislike its moral overtones, uneasy with the idea that any work is morally improving; who are we in good jobs to tell others that sweeping floors is good for them? But Brown's people repose with the ever stronger conviction that this is just middle-class squeamishness: almost all those without work do choose to take a job once the obstacles are removed.

I happen to think they are wrong about cutting lone parent benefits, but not because all benefit cuts are wrong. Having seen something of the US welfare-to-work system in Wisconsin, some cuts can be the right thing to do. But the Government is wrong this time, because it may perversely drive against getting lone parents into jobs. Lone parent benefit is paid to single parents in work, encouraging them to get a job; cutting that is no incentive.

I still think childcare is far more important. But the Chancellor's obsession with changing Family Credit into a tax credit is a mistake and a huge distraction from the main task of welfare reform. There is only so much political time and energy for change, so why squander it on something that will make no difference to work incentives?

Family Credit, the benefit that tops up low

pay to make sure it's always worth working, is so efficient it won a Charter Mark recently. Cynics say that the only reason Brown wants to remove Family Credit from social security and pay it instead into pay packets through the tax system is a vulgar ruse to lower the total social security bill: several billions would be hidden away in the nether regions of the Inland Revenue. Family Credit would just be rebadged: recipients of the new tax credit will fill out the same forms and be paid the same sums, but it will arrive via their employers instead of in a giro.

A dozen serious technical problems arise, though this week Brown's first aid team has been scurrying about putting sticking-plasters over the problems to show that it can be done. And it probably can, though small employers won't like it and will need to be bribed. But no, it will not need wholesale joint taxation of couples, and no, workers will not need to reveal intimate family details to their bosses.

Strongest objections will come from

300,000 mothers, the partners of low-paid fathers, who collect Family Credit in a social security giro: they'll lose it when it's paid into the breadwinner's pay packet instead. Though as it is, when men move off Family Credit, on average after a year, the women lose it anyway. The best quid pro quo, to show the difference between a reward for work paid to the breadwinner, and benefits for workless families, would be to ensure that in all families on social security the mother collected most of the family money and the father only collected his own small personal allowance. Now that would be a work incentive for men and a transfer of money back to women in response to Diane Coyle's survey in today's *Independent*. Also, if the Government did double child benefit for all and tax it back from the rich, which might involve a measure of joint taxation for couples, that too would redress the balance.

Despite the rhetoric, Brown's tax credit will do nothing to ease the awkward tapers out of benefit and into work. Tapers can currently be fixed at any level. So why all the fuss? Sheer conviction. Brown believes it will have profound psychological effects on the unemployed. It's hard to find anyone who agrees.

But the most extraordinary statistic revealed in the furore over the tax credit last week is this: Brown expects an astonishing tripling of the numbers of parents moving off social security and into low-paid work — a tripling of the Family Credit bill to £600. That means he expects just about every able-bodied parent now on social security will get a job. If Labour achieved that, their triumph would be so remarkable that everything else would be irrelevant quibble.

After all, current welfare-to-work plans only involve some 120,000 young people who are mainly not parents, so will not claim Family Credit. So he must be planning for virtually every lone parent to work, plus many of those now listed as sick but who may be simply dispirited. He must be planning for most wives of unemployed men to go out to work. Can it be done? Perhaps only if the Chancellor has indeed brought about the miraculous end of economic history, no more stop-go. But only last week the Governor of the Bank of England said he expected an employment downturn next year. Either the Chancellor or the Governor is wrong.

The Government pins its hopes on micro, personal policies — calling in every non-worker to show them how a job plus Family Credit will make them on average £50 a week better off. Almost any scheme that calls in the unemployed and helps them overcome personal obstacles yields rich results — and the new after-school clubs will help hugely. The question is, if the economy falters, can this micro-management buck the macro-economic trend? Now that (*pace* the article adjacent) would be a miracle indeed.

It was, declared the proud parents, a miracle and newspapers all over the world appeared to agree with them, rubber-stamping the delivery of living septuplets with that increasingly familiar cliché for the unexpected (even this newspaper, which usually prides itself on its rational sobriety, joined in). But, as miracles go, this was a rather intriguing one, because it neatly united two incompatible usages of the word. The first of these is by far the more venerable one — the sense of a divine intervention that momentarily annuls the laws of nature so as to permit the impossible. Both parents were devout Baptists and I take it that they mean exactly what they said. God had decided that their fervent prayers for one more child should be answered.

This strikes me as maliciously superfluous on God's part, almost a black joke about the dangers of getting what you wish for, but their faith seemed

undisturbed. (It was equally undisturbed by other logical paradoxes in the case — the parents had decided that it would be wrong to abort any of the foetuses, for instance, despite the considerable risk this decision involved for the health of every one of them. Here they left themselves in God's hands, trusting to his benign adjudication.) But they were only faced with this predicament, it seemed to me, because they had refused to settle for God's first decision, which was that they would not be the normal course of events conceive a second child. Quite how they know that God won't mind being overruled by the fertility treatment but absolutely put His foot down at attempts to improve its chances of success I cannot tell, but then I don't believe in Him so He's unlikely to show me His workings.)

The second meaning of miracle is more recent and entirely secular in its force. It is frequently expressed in oxymoronic form as the "miracle of science" and it refers to events which supernaturally contradict the laws of nature (and thus act as a reproof to the imperial ambitions of reason) but to any evidence of scientific technology's ability to make the laws obsolete. These days, for instance, "miracle babies" are once a prodigious miracle but now sufficiently well established to count as a "law impressed upon the nature of things". (The matter is complicated even further by the fact that quantum mechanics appears to countenance — indeed require — events which would have struck Newton as an entirely miraculous contradiction of its own mechanics.)

But there is a third meaning at work here too — either the original notion of a divine display of power or the stealthy way in which we have transferred to science the power to stand between us and the inexorable dictates of nature (only apparently inexorable, of course, because science's miracles never actually transgress the law, they simply re-interpret the law for changing circumstances). The third meaning is the casual use of "miracle" as an all purpose intensifier — an economical way of saying "wonders will never cease!" or "Critic, that was close!" In the last month alone the word "miracle" was used 394 times in British newspapers, a tally that does not, I think, indicate that we are living through the last days but rather that the no-

Risked death? Had septuplets? Welcome to the age of miracles



Bobbi and Kenny McCaughey at Des Moines Methodist Medical Center, Iowa, talking about the birth of their septuplets. Photograph: AP

THOMAS SUTCLIFFE A FAITH WITHOUT GOD



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tion of a miracle has now become substantially devalued.

It's also true, of course, that we live in a time with an undiscriminating appetite for wonders, whether it is the apparition of Lady Diana's profile in a cloud formation, as reported in the *Daily Star* last week, or the discovery of a cinnamon bun bearing the image of Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Never mind that it really would be a miracle if cinnamon buns and cloud formations didn't occasionally bear a resemblance to persons living or dead, these revelations feed the hungry. But almost anything can pass as a miracle these days. Take the instance of Mr George Suddon, a Scottish motorist described earlier this month as having had a "miracle escape" after he took a wrong turning at a level crossing and fuod himself driving down one of Scotland's busiest railway lines.

A Railtrack representative obligingly said that it was a miracle that a tragedy had not occurred (or, more probably, when a journalist asked, "Would you say that was a miracle a tragedy didn't occur?") But if you read the piece it was soon

clear that no supernatural forces had been involved in Mr Suddon's deliverance. A passer-by who saw his radical solution to traffic congestion called from an emergency phone and Scotrail swung into action. The oncoming express was halted "just a mile" from his car, which doesn't quite qualify as a "hair's breadth" escape in my book.

What's odd about the prevalence of such routine miracles (how many times have you heard that it was "a miracle no one was hurt") is that they don't testify to any religious faith on the part of those who use the word. If anything it's quite the opposite — an unfulfilled wish that our destiny might lie in the hands of something other than pure contingency. But between them science and the ebb of faith have secularised the miracle so effectively that it has lost all power to astound — has become a mere expression of compounded odds — whether it relates to road accident statistics or the success rate of fertility treatment. A miracle isn't any more what Goethe called it — "the dearest child of faith" — it's faith's surviving orphan.

A solution to our electoral problems worth voting for



JOHN
RENTOL
THE JENKINS
COMMISSION

monarch — on the basis of 44 per cent of the vote. The cynics said Labour's enthusiasm would wane if they won, although no one really expected Tony Blair to be such a beneficiary of the distortions of the present system. And yet, this afternoon, Downing Street will issue a statement announcing that Roy Jenkins is to chair a commission to come up with a "fairly proportional" voting system to be put to a referendum before — or possibly at — the next election.

This is not just any quango of the great and good set up to handle a tricky problem at arm's length from the Government. This is the Prime Minister handing over the writing of the rules of the political game to the leader of a rival party — Lord Jenkins is the outgoing leader of the Liberal Democrats in the Upper House.

And there are things that are wrong, even if they have been partially obscured by Labour's catastrophic landslide. Voters may regard Mr Blair's 179-seat majority as a reasonable expression of the popular will this time, but they remain largely alienated from the political process. And there are changes to the electoral system that could alleviate that.

What Labour people didn't like was Margaret Thatcher behaving like an absolute

46 seats on a lower share of the vote. Nevertheless, they think that if they get one-sixth of the votes they should get one-sixth of the seats, rather than one-fourteenth, which is what they got in May. Sounds fair.

Mr Blair, on the other hand, has always made the strongest anti-reform argument. He says that matching seats to votes over large areas produces a system in which the balance of power will tend to be held by small parties. He's got a point there.

The case for allowing voters to mark candidates with numbers in order of preference is unanswerable and ought to be separated from more difficult questions of how to ensure that outcomes at regional or national level are "fair". The trouble is that this elementary reform is described as a new "system", called the Alternative Vote, and attacked for being potentially less proportional than the present system. Instead it ought to be the starting point for any change.

Then there are more awkward questions about whether people get the governments they want or the breadth of representation they deserve. There remains some truth in the caricature Labourist argument,

that the Tories were able to impose the poll tax on a nation which had not voted for it. But equally, Mr Blair's objection to proportionality has considerable merit. It would tend to give too much power to small parties. If the House of Commons represented the shares of the vote in the last election in strict proportions, it would have been technically possible for John Major to have remained in Downing Street with the support of the Lib Dems and the Ulster Unionists. An extreme and politically unlikely example, but indicative of the nature of the problem.

If it can be done in a way that commands general support, some way of adding extra MPs at local or regional level to balance up party representation without trying for full proportionality would seem to be the optimum solution, and it has been suggested that Lord Jenkins sympathetic to this approach.

The question is whether the Prime Minister will see it in his interests to be flexible. It is interesting that one of the reasons for the general satisfaction with the election outcome is that he has chosen to govern as if he

were leading a coalition of Labour, Lib Dems and pro-European Tories, rather than in the fashion of his alleged role model, Mrs Thatcher.

It was also interesting that Jack Straw, the Home Secretary, in an under-reported speech in the Commons last week, made an important concession to critics of Labour's plan for a proportional system of "closed" party lists for European elections. He said he was prepared to consider the system used in Belgium and Denmark, where voters can express preferences for individual candidates on a party's list. Most voters would not necessarily opt for the party list as it is, effectively letting the party decide the order of candidates, but it would meet some of the objections about giving excessive power to party HQs.

This suggests that the Prime Minister still has an open mind on many of the important arguments. If we can get away from the obsession with proportionality, and from silly caricatures of Irish and Israeli systems, today's announcement offers a genuine prospect of enhancing our democracy.

HE'S NOT OUT OF THE WOODS YET



Last Friday's vote brings us one step closer to outlawing hunting with dogs. But there's still a long way to go. Will you become a Friend of the RSPCA and join our fight to ban this cruelty for good?

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مكانت من الأصل

First, the dress. Then the party ...

Welcome to dress stress, the Christmas dose. The summer bit comes, you remember, when the first wedding/birthday/christening/garden party invitation of the year drops on to the mat.

Now, of course, it is the season to be merry. Invariably this means that we are expected to dress up like the female version of a Christmas tree – something, incidentally, that is all too easy to do, judging by the number of sparkly, sequined numbers in the shops.

We should like you to avoid that Christmas-tree look (you know we're right). After a great trawl of the high street, we have found six party dresses, all of which cost less than £100, are not overdone, and are versatile – to do brilliantly at the Christmas party, and beyond. Each dress was chosen on its individual merits, but each one speaks for itself – without shouting too loudly. They are also all in the shops right now. It is worth remembering that the ultimate party dress should invite the response "You look fab in that dress", not "that dress is fab". Furthermore, only a few accessories are needed: high-heeled shoes, a simple evening bag and a beaded necklace are enough. Get shopping.

Melanie Rickey



Above: The Sixties number
Black dress, £99, by Monsoon, 264 Oxford Street, London W1, and branches nationwide (enquiries, 0171-313 3000); black necklace, £4.99, by Accessorize, 293 Oxford Street, London W1, and branches nationwide (enquiries, 0171-313 3000); leopard print shoes, £49.99, by Carvela, Brent Cross Shopping Centre, London NW4 (for nearest stockist, call 0171-546 1888).

Photographer: Kevin Ford Stylist: Holly Davies Model: Caitlin Oliver

OK, so a red ribbon is for Aids awareness – but what about a tartan one, or a green one?

Today is the 10th World Aids Day, which means that millions of people around the world should be reaching for their red ribbons – but what, asks a confused Jasper Pleydell-Bouverie, do all the other colours represent?

Over the past few weeks I've seen yellow, green, black, pink, scarlet, tartan, multicoloured, light blue and, of course, red ribbons pinned on to various lapels. Very colourful it all is, but it's also slightly unnerving. The wearer is, after all, communicating his or her political, social and possibly sexual leanings for all to see, and it's not always clear what the message is.

Take green, for example. You might assume that the wearer was a keen environmentalist, and green ribbons are indeed worn by green people. But they have also been worn by members of Sinn Féin, and, earlier this year, were stuck on the caps of professional golfers – in sympathy with a caddie with leukaemia. Imagining meeting someone wearing a green ribbon; do you talk about deforestation, decommissioning, or the final round at Muirfield in 1966?

I am not the only one to suffer such confusion. Red Ribbon International (RRI), which or-

ganises the Aids Awareness ribbon in the UK, is regularly asked for advice on ribbon identification. Apparently a lot of people, when they spot a new colour, think it's a different Aids cause. "We had a lot of trouble with black ribbons," says Mike Camping, director of RRI. "Many people thought that it was something to do with black people and Aids."

RRI run an unofficial ribbon advisory service. They have an office list, regularly updated, of all the ribbon campaigns of which they are aware. Black, Mike Camping was able to tell me, has been used by Oxford in a Rwanda fundraising campaign, and it was also used

by Anti-Aids campaigners in Spain last July. And then it was used at the funeral of the Princess of Wales.

In Scotland, thanks to Waverley Care in Edinburgh, the Aids awareness ribbon is tartan, and the Stonewall Group have their own rainbow ribbon in the colours of the gay flag to support gay and lesbian rights. Dark blue is worn for "ME awareness" in Britain and "total freedom on the Internet" in the US. Mauve is for animal rights. Yellow is for "I want someone home" – usually a political hostage or a prisoner of war, but most recently Louise Woodward. And pale blue could mean that the wearer was a supporter of the anti-drink-drive campaign or the Coventry Community Safety Team 1996, whatever that may be.

Is it just me who's ignorant – or do most people not know what these "other ribbons" refer to? When we're told? The original Aids ribbon was

launched at the Toni Awards ceremony in New York in 1991, but I get the impression that some of these others were dreamt up at village hall meetings – possibly in cahoots with a local haberdasher's. (Apparently orange ribbon hasn't been selling too well recently. Perhaps we should expect a campaign. Ulstermen? Sun-worshippers? Friends of the man from Del Monte?)

Strange though it may seem – given the simplicity of the red ribbon concept – there are companies that will supply tied ribbons specifically for your campaign. I rang one, called Alan Salter, which supplies pink ribbons to breast cancer charities, and got the impression that the company was buoyant on the tide of ribbon mama. Yes, a spokeswoman told me, they were answering increasing numbers of enquiries about ribbon, and next year I could expect multicoloured ribbon campaigns, and ribbons with logos

printed through them. "We could do you any colour you like," she added hopefully. "If your paper wants to launch a campaign for something, then we could supply the ribbons. You could, say, have 200 limited-edition ribbons and sell them for £5 each."

Clearly, the original idea of ribbon-wearing – intended as easy, simple and cheap – is undergoing prostitution, but is this having any effect on the red ribbon campaign? Happily not, according to Mike Camping. Most people know what the red ribbon stands for, and far more red ribbons have been distributed than any other colour – 6 million every year compared with about 500,000 of all other colours put together. In total more than 100 million have been distributed world-wide and this year they are being worn for the first time in countries as far-flung as Ecuador, Senegal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Cambodia and the Philippines.

All being well, such initiatives should prevent the Aids awareness ribbon being overwhelmed in the confusion that surrounds its imitators. Benetton's new advertising campaign, launched this week, will help. It shows the newest addition to their Undercolors range, knick-knacks featuring the red ribbon.

It is already one of the most widely understood symbols in

the world; we can only hope that, for the sake of world health, the red ribbon becomes even more widely known. Thanks to WH Smith, this week there will be no excuse not to wear one; they will be displaying collection boxes and red ribbons in 400 stores to raise much-needed funds for the National Aids Trust. The fight, after all, goes on.

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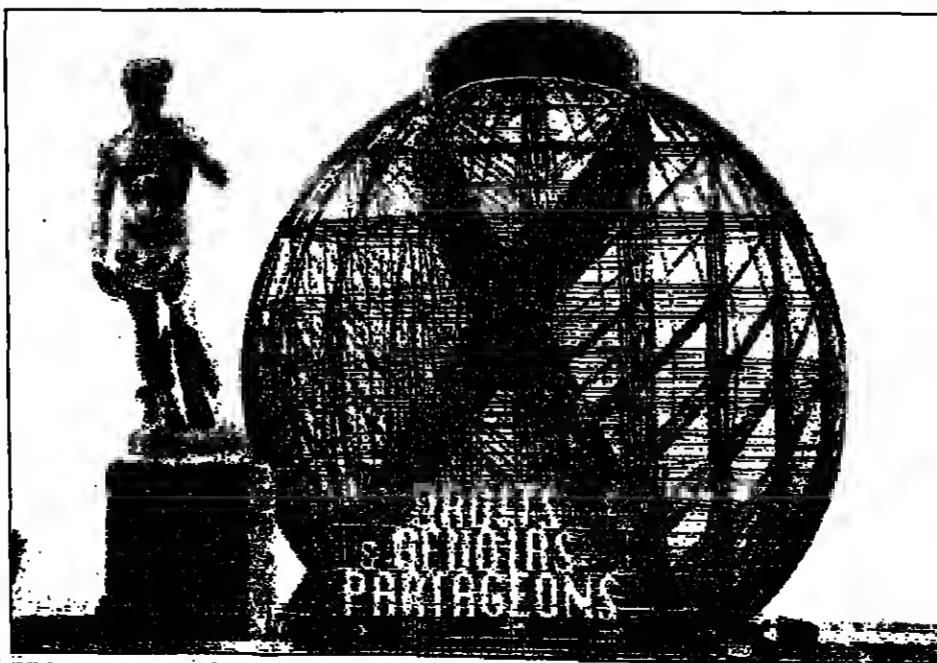
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**DEBORAH
ROSS**
TALKS TO
ANDREW MORTON

He is probably the richest journalist in England, and he has certainly been one of the most reviled. But it didn't need to turn out like that. He would still be languishing quietly in Muswell Hill if Diana had not decided that he was her Noah.

We now know that Andrew Morton's *Diana, Her True Story* was based on the Princess's own words. He has the six C90 tapes to prove it, plus the hastily updated and snappily retitled *Diana, Her True Story - In Her Own Words*, which will earn him a second fortune for practically no extra work, the cheeky little monkey.

But the big question, I suppose, is why did she, a woman with the world at her feet, pick him, a former *Daily Star* hack, and not, say, me, who wasn't so busy in 1991 that I couldn't have fitted her in between *Supermarket Sweep* and *This Morning*, if pressed?

Pure luck, Andrew? Because you happened to be researching her biography at the time she was desperate to get her side of things across? No, he insists. It was not merely a right time, right place scenario. Not by a long chalk. He's an historian and author, primarily. A serious bloke. The man for the job. Her official biographer, if you like.

Indeed, Diana's nickname for him, he reveals, was always Noah. "Tell Noah to get the story out," she would say to her confidants.

The nickname, he explains, arose after he'd been described in an American publication as a "notable author and historian". The resulting acronym tickled the Princess, he says. Personally, I think it quite touting that she could think "author" begins with an "o". But, then, Noah would have been a disaster. "Andrew Morton! Noah..." And that would have been it, wouldn't it?

But, as it was, "I had been writing on royals for 10 years. I knew the social landscape. I knew the system. And I knew, already, that the reality of her life did not match the image. Diana's friends and staff were dropping dark hints about her unhappiness, and she needed the truth to come out, needed to confess. It was like Dostoevsky's moths gathering around the flame."

Obviously, Andrew's not just a hack who happened to land the journalistic equivalent of a big lottery win. He knows his Russian novels. I'm impressed. I didn't even know Dostoevsky kept moths. Certainly, he wants you to know he's an erudite and learned thinker.

"The outpouring of grief that erupted with Diana's death was very Chaucerian and medieval, don't you think?" He mourns her passing greatly. "We'll be lucky to see anything on such a scale in our lifetimes again."

Anyway, he was totally rubbish when, in 1992, the book first came out. He was a "tabloid vulgarian from Leeds" who wrote "novelette purple", and had made it all up anyway. The hulminia. The suicide attempts. Charles's adultery. Pull the other one, it's got the Hitler diaries on it. Initially, no newspaper would touch it when it came to the serialisation rights. "Basically, I was called a liar," he says.

Yes, he would love to have shouted out "actually, Diana was in on this", but he couldn't.

"She trusted me. It would have been a betrayal."

Did he find the flak hurtful? "I didn't bother reading a lot of it, it was such crap."

How did he keep his spirits up? "By



Andrew Morton: "My interest was in psychologically understanding her. Why did she throw herself down the stairs at Sandringham? Why was she bulimic?"

Photograph: Glyn Griffiths

He couldn't shout: 'Diana was in on this.' 'She trusted me. It would have been a betrayal'

knowing I was being true to myself." He is quite big when it comes to self-delusion, I think. He even, it has been suggested, used to think the Princess was a little in love with him. True? "No, absolute rubbish," he cries. Did he ever fall a little in love with her? "No. My interest was in psychologically understanding her. What had her childhood done to her? Why did she throw herself down the stairs at Sandringham? Why was she bulimic?"

But is Andrew being true to himself – or to Diana, for that matter – with this new, updated version of the book, which includes 69 pages of her own, transcribed words? The Red Cross was not impressed. It refused to accept a donation from him. Bob Geldof was even less impressed. He called Andrew "a lousy creep gorging on the memory of the woman who handed him his cheque".

What does Andrew make of such reactions?

"I just didn't understand it. By attacking me, they were attacking the Princess of Wales, who wanted the story written." But she never wanted to be identified as the source, did she? "I'd left the tapes in my will to Sussex University, to be used after my death. It would not have occurred to me to reveal them; she had died.

"I first met Mike [Michael O'Mara, his publisher] the day after the funeral. He was already being criticised for not doing a reprint of the original book, which was selling out everywhere. We had a long discussion about the need to revise the book, but we did, should we use the tapes? It was not a decision we took lightly. I could have just reissued the first book, then gone

to £300,000 between them to a charity other than the Red Cross, that also helps land-mine victims. The first book, which was translated into 29 languages and sold in 80 countries, is said to have made them £5m each. The new one has topped the best-seller lists since the day it came out.

Andrew Morton is a huge man: 6ft 4in,

huge shoulders, huge hands, huge neck;

huge, square jaw; hugely handsome in a very Christopher-Reeve-meets-Clark-Kent-via-a-shopping-spree-in-C&A sort of way. He thinks it was his height, plus, of course, his intelligence, that first aroused him to do with class hatred. "If you are given £100m just for being born, it's OK. But if you work hard and earn some money, then the British despise you."

I tell him that not all British journalists are bitter and twisted and jealous. But, that said, your tie's horrid, and you do write novelette purple

We meet at a hotel, which is a shame, because I would like to have seen his house in Highgate, north London, which is worth £1m, and very smart by all accounts. He won't have it, though. The trouble with inviting journalists in, he says, is that they "later go off and spend three paragraphs sneering at your furniture".

I am disappointed. I tell him, but can

see them has a point. I can't even leave my own house without sneering over my furniture. You should see the carpet in the front room. A horrible thing with swirl patterns on it. Even I think less of myself whenever I see it.

He goes on to grumble a lot about journalism today. It's all adversarial, he complains, "it's like everyone wants to get in the ring with me and take a punch." He prefers, he says, the American style, "because you can just go on and tell a story. Where can you do that here? Newsnight?"

I don't think so. All you can do is go to *Richard and Judy* and have an hysterical phone-in." I tell him that not all British journalists are bitter and twisted and jealous. (But, that said, your tie's horrid and you do write novelette purple. "Like a gust of wind across a field of corn, her mood fluctuated endlessly." Not, I think, a line nicked from Dostoevsky.)

Andrew Morton was born and brought up in Yorkshire. His father, Alec, ran a picture framing and art materials business in Dewsbury. He thinks a lot of the enmity he aroused had to do with class hatred. "If you are given £100m just for being born, it's OK. But if you work hard and earn some money, then the British despise you."

He began researching his Diana book in the winter of 1990. Of course, he did not expect Diana to collaborate. But, two so,

he asked Dr James Colthurst – a mutual friend – if he would ask her to consider answering some questions. Amazingly, she agreed. Why? Because, he thinks, "she wanted to get her retaliation in first."

Retaliation against whom? "Charles, for going back to Camilla shortly after their marriage." Then Charles got his own back by doing *Panorama*... "He says that any accusations that he might have further wounded Princes William and Harry with his revelations are ludicrous. Their parents had said it all in public already."

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Jon Silkin

Jon Silkin, poet; born London 2 December 1930; FRSL 1986; married 1974 Lorna Tracy (three sons, one daughter and one son deceased; marriage dissolved 1995); died Newcastle upon Tyne 25 November 1997.

John Silkin was first and foremost one of the most distinctive and distinguished of those British poets who began to publish in the 1950s. He was the founder-editor of one of the country's best known literary publications, the quarterly magazine *Stand*, a vehicle for new poetry and short fiction which he "drove", in every sense of the word, for 45 years, an extraordinary life for a "little" magazine.

He was a wonderfully acute, incisive and creatively illuminating critic of others' writing; a most gifted teacher of literature and creative writing to both young and adult students; and at his best a spellbinding reader of his own verse. (To observe a large group of cynical and sharp-witted sixth-formers not at fooled by his pretence that he was working-class, become mesmerised by the quality of his reading, and of what he was reading, was to witness a repeatable miracle.)

He was no nationalist and fervently believed in the importance of poetry in translation. There is a collection of his translations of the Israeli poet Amir Gilboa as well as a new volume of his own in the pipeline. Silkin died in harness; it is poignantly typical of his stakhanovite work rate that from his hospital bed he was sending out drafts of versions of Lope de Vega, inviting friends to comment.

He was a leading authority on the poets of the First World War, not only in his best-known

critical work *Out of Battle* (1972) but in many lectures and writings on Wilfred Owen and his beloved Isaac Rosenberg. His almost intuitive understanding of the war poets whose work did so much to promote is remarkable. He also produced successful anthologies drawn from both the poetry and (with the poet Jon Glover) the prose of the First World War and of verse from *Stand*. *Poetry of the Committed Individual* (1973). (There was never anything catchier than Silkin's titles.)

He was, crucially, very conscious of and proud of his Jewishness. It was in many ways one of the principal energising sources of his poetry; one thinks specifically of "Astringents" about the murder of Jews in York in 1910, or "A Word About Freedom and Identity in Tel-Aviv", but the currents ran deep underground, too.

All of these activities – passions, rather – were seamlessly woven into the same man. He was born in 1930, the grandson of turn-of-the-century Jewish immigrants whose family was to make important contributions in law, Labour politics, planning and education to British life in the post-war period. Apart from war-time evacuation to Wales (which he thoroughly enjoyed), his early years were spent in London. After education at Wycliffe and Dulwich Colleges he made his way in the world from an early age as a poet.

He began *Stand* in 1952 to "take a stand" against the moral, social and artistic apathy of the times. Two years later appeared one of the great debut volumes, I believe, of the century: *The Peaceable Kingdom*, a collection of extraordinary power, accomplishment and lyrical feeling. It still has the feel of the real thing, the authentic lang of indisputably major poetry. It contains his most famous poem

"Death of a Son" which has moved audiences for decades ("He turned over on his side with his one year / Red as a wound / He turned over as if he could be sorry for this / And out of his eyes two great tears rolled, like stones, and he died"). It also offered what is perhaps his major theme, the division between nature and mankind, our fall from that paradisal state in Isaiah II where the wolf "shall dwell with the lamb", images of which one of his favourite artists, the American Edward Hicks, painted over and over again. Silkin too came back to the theme again and again – indeed his 1965 collection which won the Geoffrey Faber Memorial Prize was called *Nature With Man* in an emblematic attempt, as it were, to heal the rift.

He went to Leeds University as a Gregory Fellow in 1958 and read English there. (The university recently purchased the *Stand* archive for posterity.) Offered financial support for the magazine by the fledgling North Eastern Association for the Arts, he moved to Newcastle in 1965 where he continued to live until his death, latterly with his partner of some years, Toshiko Fujoka.

The magazine and Northern House, the press for poetry pamphlets he started with Leeds associates, have played a midwife's role, at least in part, to many writers who later became prominent, from the playwright Harold Pinter and David Mercer to poets such as Geoffrey Hill, Tony Harrison, Ken Smith (his *Stand* co-editor for several years), Michael Hamburger, Roy Fisher, and such Scots as Sorley Maclean and Iain Crichton Smith. Later, through the sterling work of the American fiction-writer Lorna Tracy (his wife for more

than 20 years), who was also a co-editor, short stories became an integral part of the magazine, and novelists such as Peter Carey found an early home in its pages. This is the function of magazines such as *Stand*. Without them, what space for new serious writers, what seed-beds exist? Without them, infotainment rules.

In recent years the stocky, bustling figure of a diminutive Old Testament prophet with white hair and beard, dressed in clothes left behind from *Writing for God*, has been seen less often budgeing queues in wind and rain outside cinemas and theatres to buy copies of *Stand*: it was once one of the most familiar sights four times a year in university towns and London on the selling-trips that shifted much of the print-run. In an age of evasion, his directness could be very, very blunt.

Curiously, for a man of potent intellect, he could be touchingly naive and ignorant about the world beyond literary affairs. He was a famously difficult friend and he could certainly be combative, prickly and vexatious. But he was also engagingly genial, marvelously funny, a sympathetic and solicitous friend, and endlessly generous with time and attention to the writing of others. He had an uncaring finger to put on a poem's weakness but it was tactfully placed, and he was genuinely grateful to the very end for constructive criticism from trusted friends. He loved to dispute with rabbinical energy fine nuances of feeling and interpretation, leaping to his feet every so often to bring Webster's and the *Shorter Oxford Dictionary* to his aid.

He was endlessly surprising even to one who knew him for 35 years not long ago he asked me which modern poet I thought had been the most powerful influence and model for his early writing. Fixed by that heady gaze and mischievous grin, I made some obvious noises about D.H. Lawrence, Isaac Rosenberg, and threw in Dylan Thomas. He nodded approvingly. "Not bad," he said, "but the answer's Eliot!" Coming from someone who could catch from a mile away the faintest whiff of anti-semitism, who introduced me to the acerbic poem on TS Eliot by Emanuel Litvinoff, who had once sent me appalled re-oxes of Eliot's *After Strange Gods*, this left me speechless, much to his amusement.

His poetry rarely made things easy for his readers – the style was the man to an unusual degree – and his terse and knotty syntax, the compactness and complexity of language, the dedicated exploration of human pain, suffering and cruelty, must have lost him some of his rightful constituency. But he loathed anything that smacked of smooth and easy elegance or playing to the gallery, and in the last few years, suffering as he was from angina and concerned about his diabetes, he began to feel to his chagrin that he was being sidelined.

It is time new readers came to his glorious "Flower Poems", the Lawrentian poems about creatures, the American and Australian insights, the sharp and funny social-political poems of the 1960s ("Many liberals don't just 'make love, they first ask each other . . .': 'Re-spectabilities'"). Soon there will be nearly a dozen volumes to choose from. Apart from the poetry it may well be that one of his most challenging and valuable works will turn out to be *The Life of Merit and Free Verse in Twentieth Century Poetry*, which appeared earlier this year and is typically dense with provocative insights.

– Rodney Pybus



Silkin: a diminutive Old Testament prophet of provocative insights. Photograph: Christopher Barker

Daniel Farson

Daniel Negley Farson, photographer, broadcaster and writer; born 8 January 1927; died 27 November 1997.

Mythomaniacal, egotistical, and often unable to tell the truth or the difference between it and fiction, the character of Daniel Farson – photographer, writer, and drunk – is redeemed by at least one grace: that of self-awareness: "One of the more bizarre aspects of my life is the way it has veered from triumph to disaster without my seeming to notice the change."

Farson was the son of Negley Farson, a renowned American foreign correspondent, author of the Thirties best-seller *The Way of a Transgressor* and, like his son, an alcoholic. "My father's guilt made me guilty," wrote Farson, as much about his sexuality as his addiction to drink. He remained in thrall to his father's fame, even when his own exceeded it; while Francis Bacon taunted his friend by declaring Negley's books "second-rate". Farson was proud enough of them to send one as a calling card to the reclusive aesthete Stephen Tennant.

Farson's childhood was a peripatetic one as he was evacuated to Canada during the Second World War, and spent holidays in the United States. At 17 he became the youngest ever Parliamentary and Lobby Correspondent for "an ancient press agency where no one else

was young enough to be mobile". He spent his National Service years in the American Army Air Corps, and at 21 relinquished his dual nationality in favour of Britain, while taking advantage of the GI Bill of Rights to go up to Cambridge.

There he started the magazine *Panorama* with Anthony West. An article satirising the *Picture Post* had Farson summoned to that magazine's offices, only to leave them with the post of staff photographer. He was soon photographing the likes of Noel Coward, who happily struck all manner of attitudes for the blond newcomer's lens.

But it was at the age of 23 that Farson was launched fatefully into the world of Soho Bohemia, a world of dives and drunks whose tentacles would never let him go. He had been innocent until then, unmoored: "Soho cast me. All too quickly, I made up for lost time." It became his second home, "often my first", and introduced him to Francis Bacon: "I moved out of my father's shadow and into Bacon's." Farson admitted his role of hanger-on; and yet, as a photographer and writer of some talent, his value lies in observations of a world whose habitués were too busy drinking to document themselves. Conversely, he was unable to write a book without putting himself in it; an attempt to render himself as part of the Soho myth. Friends wondered

how he remembered in-depth conversations from the night before. He probably didn't: he was already being barred from the French House for behaviour he could not repeat.

From photo-journalism Farson moved via the Merchant Navy (crossing the Equator four times) and newspaper journalism (writing for the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Mail*) to television, joining Associated Rediffusion "in the exciting early days of TV when no boundaries were set and we were able to explore". Such a

brief suited Farson, and explorations included having to cut off a drunken Caitlin Thomas in full flow, and an equally drunken interview with Bacon for *The Art Game*, filmed on 27 August 1958. During the long delays between changing film magazines, Bacon and Farson consumed large quantities of oysters and champagne, and when the three hours of film was edited to 15 minutes, "the startling effect was an instant transformation from two sober Jekylls into two alcoholic Hydes".

Farson went on to appear in a series of shows, from *This Week to Living for Keeps*, ending, as his fame declined, with an art game show called *Gallery* in which he called upon the talents of old friends such as Michael Wishart. It was bizarre to see such sacred monsters of Bohemia dragged out on afternoon television. Wishart answering banal questions in his catatonic drawl while a studio audience was ordered to applaud.

Television fame made Farson's half-handsome, prefect-fa-

face nationally recognisable. It also gave an added frisson to the encounters with rent boys: like Wilde and Coward, Farson was feasting with the panthers of the East End.

He discovered the charms of the sailors and barrow boys of Limehouse – an area which seemed to operate outside the law – and set up home at 92 Narrow Street, to be joined by Bacon and other figures such as the writer Andrew Sinclair and, later, the struggling doctor David Owen. Here not even the Kray Twins (with whom Farson was intimate) descended to "renting", i.e. homosexual blackmail. Like Wilde, Farson saw his East End boys as a race apart, describing them in a letter to Stephen Tennant as having "a real sense of chivalry . . . these young men looked and behaved like true aristocrats".

In 1962, using money left by his parents, Farson set up a "singing pub". The Waterman's Arms, on the Isle of Dogs, he was, as Colin MacInnes recognised, "realising his own dream". His celebrity summoned an extraordinary mixture of names to this muddy loop in the lower Thames. Bacon brought William Burroughs to join Jacques Tati, Shirley Bassey, Clint Eastwood, Judy Garland or Groucho Marx. "Finally, The Waterman's Arms was killed by its own success," wrote Sinclair. "... in a way, Farson was like [David] Owen, destroying the culture he loved by introducing it to the glam-

our and power of other parts of other cities".

By 1964 Farson had made his break with London, camping to the Grey House, Braunton, North Devon, also a legacy of his parents'. There he wrote his books – 27 in total, rather relying his reputation of drunken ineptitude – on subjects ranging from Jack the Ripper and Bram Stoker (his great-uncle) to historical fiction and, well, historical fiction, as many regarded his own memoirs of life in Limehouse and Soho to be.

Perhaps his greatest achievement was his best-selling *The Gilded Gunner Life of Francis Bacon* (1993), originally commissioned in 1982 but delivered ten years later after Bacon's death.

Farson's subjective biography is full of Farson; his life blended with that of his subject: the effect is to render the author as an adjunct to the artist's self, rather than securing his – Farson's – place in art history. His 1991 book on Gilbert and George in Moscow had a similar agenda, while bringing Farson into the modern world of Sobibor. From Devon he made roving forays into Soho, lost weekends during which he would succeed in beguiling, and offending, a whole new generation of Sohoites.

Perhaps most extraordinary is a last, almost delirious portrait of Farson in Robert Tewdwr Moss's posthumously published travelogue *Cleopatra's Wedding Present* (1997), in which the au-

thor encounters the apoplectically drunken Farson in a Syrian hotel and is accused of all kinds of calumny – most egregiously, seduction of the local youth, a misdemeanour of which Farson himself was much more likely to be guilty. Cornering Tewdwr Moss in a restaurant over a plate of roasted sparrow, a red-faced Farson splutters, "And by Jove, sonny, if I see you again, I shall make it my job to destroy you and your career". In between threats he was snatching up the bodies of the birds and stuffing them into his mouth – naked little ornithological corpses, sliding down into the maws of hell."

Somehow Dan Farson managed to escape the maws of hell by recycling his incontinent life in his books, making a living out of myth. He kept abreast with a sometimes cruel cast of solipsists whose only loyalty was to themselves and their kind; and then not always to be relied upon. What he leaves behind, in photographs and words – perhaps most notably in his book *Soho in the Fifties* (1987) – is a record of that world which, while doubtless wild, inaccurate and full of his own hyperbole, is probably as close to the truth as we will ever get. His autobiography, *Never A Normal Man*, was published early this year, shortly after his 70th birthday. It was a final, bloodshot eye-witness report from the edge before he tottered over it.

– Philip Hoare



'Never a normal man': Farson (right) and Francis Bacon in the 1950s at the first Soho Fair

Announcements for Deaths, Births, Marriages & Deaths (Births, Adoptions, Marriages, Deaths, Memorials, Services, Weddings, Anniversaries, In Memoriam) should be sent in writing to the Gazette Editor, The Independent, 1 Canada Square, Canary Wharf, London E14 5DL, telephone 071-971-2011 (24-hour answering machine 071-971-2012) or fax 071-971-2013 (24-hour answering machine 071-971-2014) and charged £6.50 a line (VAT extra). OTHER Gazette announcements (notices, functions, forthcoming marriages, funerals) must be submitted in writing (or faxed) and are charged at £10 a line, VAT extra. They should be accompanied by a daytime telephone number.

ROYAL ENGAGEMENTS
The Queen and The Duke of Edinburgh attended the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium, 1997. The Queen and Prince Charles, Patron of the Royal Variety Performance, attended the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium, 1997. The Queen and Prince Charles, Patron of the Royal Variety Performance, attended the Royal Variety Performance at the London Palladium, 1997.

Birthdays

Mr Woody Allen, film actor, writer and director, 62; Professor Sir Norman Browne, consultant surgeon, 66; Mr Anthony Cox, chief constable, Suffolk, 56; Mr Gordon Cross, composer, 60; Mr Mike Denness, former Test cricketer, 57; Miss Eva Evdokimova, ballerina, 49; Mr Frank Gillard, broadcaster, 89; Lord Glenconner, governing director, Tennants Estate Agents, 71; Dame Alunica Markova, prima ballerina assoluta, 87; Mr Keith Michell, actor and director, 69; Miss Bette Midler, singer and comedienne, 52; Mr Salma Nazer, Pakistani test cricketer, 19; Mr Gilbert O'Sullivan, singer, 51; Sir William Plaistow, former civil servant, 73; Mr Stephen Polkoff, playwright, 45; Mr Richard Pryor, actor, 57; Maj-Gen Sir Desmond Rice, 73; Dame Mildred Riddell, former senior civil servant, 94; Mr Andy Ripley, former rugby international, 50; Lord Roll of Ipsden, president of the S.G. Warburg Group, 90; Mr Lee Trevino, golfer, 58.

Anniversaries

Births: Madame Marie Tussaud (Grosvenor), waxwork exhibitor, 1761;

Queen Alexandra, consort of Edward VII, 1844; Alfred Cellier, composer, 1844; Henry Williamson, author and novelist, 1895; Mary Martin, actress and singer, 1913; Deaderick St. John, 1913; Lorenzo Ghiberti, Florentine sculptor, 1455; Pope Leo X, 1521; St Edmund Campion, St Alexander Briant, St Ralph Sherwin, Jesuit martyrs, executed, 1581; Dr George Birkbeck, founder of Birkbeck College, 1841; Ebenezer Elliott, poet and "anti-Corn Law rhymester", 1849; Samuel Courtauld, industrialist, 1947; Sir Peter Henry Buck (Te Rangi Hiroa), Maori anthropologist and statesman, 1951; John Burton Sanderson Haldane, scientist, 1964; David Ben Gurion, Israeli statesman, 1973. On this day Portugal became independent of Spain 1640; the Royal Academy of Arts was founded, 1768; Jacques Alexandre Cesar Charles made the first ascent in a hydrogen-filled balloon, France, 1783; German East Africa was cleared of German troops, 1917; the British Second Army entered Germany, 1918; Lady Nancy Astor became the first woman to take her seat in the House of Commons as an MP 1919; "points" rationing was introduced in Britain, 1941; HMS *Tanguard*, Britain's largest battleship, was launched at Clydebank by Princess Elizabeth, 1944; Britain issued its first set of special Christmas stamps, 1966; the Isaac Newton telescope, largest in Western Europe, was inaugurated at the Royal Greenwich Observatory, 1967; Mikhail Gorbachev, leader of the Soviet Union, met the pope, John Paul II in the Vatican, 1989; the two pilot tunnels for the Channel Tunnel were joined, thus linking the two coasts for the first time, 1990. Today is the Feast Day of St Agapitus or Arys, St Alexander Briant, St Ansanus, St Edmund Campion, St Eligius or Eloy, St Ralph Sherwin and St Tudwal.

Lectures
Victoria and Albert Museum: Eleanor Thompson, "Identifying Baltic and Scandinavian Silver", 2.30pm.
Gresham College, Barnard's Inn Hall, London EC1: Nayantara Sahgal, "Imagining India", 5.30pm.
King's College London: Ian Pearson, "The Future of Social Technology", 2pm.

The following notes of judgments were prepared by the reporters of the *All England Law Reports*.

Duty
R v Canterbury Crown Court ex parte Wagstaff QBD (Dw Ct) (Kennedy LJ, Smith J) 2 Oct 1997
Where HM Customs & Excise had appealed to the Crown Court under s 147(2) of the Customs & Excise Management Act 1979 against a decision of the magistrates' court to remit the case to the magistrates' court with a direction to hold fresh committal proceedings. Customs & Excise had a right to appeal against any decision of the justices including the exercise of their discretion as to mode of trial, and once that decision had been set aside the justices were no longer *functus officio* and were under a duty to proceed.

Alex Mire (Tame Saine Decher) for the applicant, Seddon Cripps (G & E Solicitors) for the Commissioners of Customs & Excise.
Magistrates' court
R v Hanratty, London EC1: Nayantara Sahgal, QBD (Pmer J, U Smith J) 24 Oct 1997.
Where HM Customs & Excise had jurisdiction under s 48 of the Supreme Court Act 1981 to remit the case to the magistrates' court with a direction to hold fresh committal proceedings. Customs & Excise had a right to appeal against any decision of the justices including the exercise of their discretion as to mode of trial, and once that decision had been set aside the justices were no longer *functus officio* and were under a duty to proceed.

Frank Pinford (Wilson & Co) for the applicant, the respondent did not appear and was not represented.
Income tax
Billingham (Inspector of Taxes) v John Chid (Pmer J, U Smith J) 2 Nov 1997.
Although the High Court had

power to intervene on an application for judicial review, where bias in a magistrates' court was alleged, if there was disputed evidence which could not be resolved on affidavit, it was plainly wrong to come to the High Court to seek a remedy which that court could not provide. In such circumstances an applicant's counsel should advise him to appeal to the Crown Court.
Timothy Brennan (Inland Revenue Solicitor) for the Inspector: the taxpayer in person.</

Giants to pull out of drinks retailing

Allied Domecq and Whitbread are preparing to sell their off-licence chains. Andrew Yates says the move by the drinks giants heralds a huge shake-up of the troubled retailing end of the industry.

Allied Domecq is believed to have put its Victoria Wine off-licence chain on the market. Whitbread is also considering selling its off-licence business, which includes brands such as Thresher, Bottoms Up and Wine Rack.

Analysts believe that Parisa, the UK's largest independent off-licence group, is likely to launch a bid for one or both of the chains. Parisa was formed in August with the £56m management buyout of Greenalls' off-licence chain backed by venture capitalists CVC Capital Partners and NatWest Ventures.

Nader Haghjoo, Parisa's chief executive, said: "We are always looking for possible acquisitions as long as they are at the right price." However he refused to comment on whether Parisa was preparing to mount

a takeover for Victoria Wine or Thresher.

Other venture capitalist groups are also likely to be interested in acquiring the chains.

A deal is unlikely to be concluded before the end of the year. Buyers and sellers will want to assess how the chains perform in the run-up to Christmas. However Allied and Whitbread are understood to have decided that the off-licence businesses no longer feature in their long-term strategies and at least one is likely to be sold within the next few months.

The off-licence industry has been hit by growing competition from the supermarket chains, which now stock a variety of beers, wines and spirits.

Drinks sales have also been affected by the surge in cross-channel shopping. Growing numbers of customers are going to France on day trips to pick up car loads of cheap booze.

The disposals of Victoria Wine and Thresher will prompt the long overdue consolidation of the industry. Some outlets and chains are likely to be closed and others rebranded as the new owners attempt to fight back against the supermarkets.

Parisa has already shown the way forward for the industry by launching Booze Buster, a discount chain designed to undercut Sainsbury and Tesco.

Other off-licence chains are also likely to come on to the market in the wake of the Allied and Whitbread deals.

Allied announced last month that Victoria Wine's trading profits had fallen by £3m in the year to August. City observers point out that Allied no longer needs a chain of off-licences



Bailing out: Whitbread may sell Thresher, whose operating profits rose just 3 per cent

Photograph: Kalpesh Lathigra

through which to channel its own beer, having effectively exited brewing with the sale of its 50 per cent stake in Carlsberg-Tetley. Allied is now willing to sell the businesses to concentrate on brokering a spirits merger with a number of international partners in the wake of the £23bn merger of Grand Metropolitan and Guinness.

Whitbread is understood to be keen to expand its restaurant

and pub interests rather than pump more investment into Thresher. Over the past few years the group has turned itself into a diversified leisure group after an acquisition spree which has seen it purchase David Lloyd's health clubs and the Cafe Rouge and Dome restaurant chains.

Whitbread's operating profits rose just 3 per cent in the six months to August, well below

the level of growth Whitbread achieved in its leisure business.

There is speculation that Whitbread is also looking to sell its brewing business. With beer sales in the UK falling, Whitbread finds itself with a 15 per cent share of a declining market.

Whitbread will announce today a £50m investment in its Hoggshead pub chain. It plans to open 40 sites next year and create 800 jobs.

Toad poised for make-or-break bids

Chris Evans, the millionaire entrepreneur, is poised to pull off a string of deals at Toad, his struggling car technology group. But, as Sameen Ahmad reports, if the expansion strategy fails, he might have to turn his back on the City and take his company private.

sidiary of South African Breweries. Industry sources suggest Toad is stalking the Heywood Williams division.

Toad is believed to be considering raising new funds from the market for the acquisitions but is understood to have enough backing from private sources, including Bill Gates of Microsoft.

Toad is capitalised at just £6m after its share price collapsed in 12 months from a 118p high. The shares fell by one-third in February after Charles Parker, the chief executive, walked out after only 27 days in the job over "irreconcilable differences" of management style.

Three more Toad directors were told to go between March and June after Kevin Gray, Toad's new chief executive, embarked on a round of cost-cutting. If the share price continues to founder, Dr Evans will consider taking the company private.

Dr Evans founded and floated a string of companies, including biotechnology specialists Chiroscience and Celsis. He is now chairman of Toad.

In a high-profile deal in May, Dr Evans gave the broadcaster Noel Edmonds' Unique group 500,000 Toad shares from his personal holding in return for publicity. Mr Edmonds has an earnout with Toad worth another 1 million shares in the next two years if the price, currently just over 20p, reaches 240p and Toad's name achieves 30 per cent public recognition.

Stakis to spend £14m on expanding its casino division and creating mass-market appeal

Stakis, the hotel and leisure group, is gambling on a large expansion of its casino division, despite a poor performance from the business over the past few years. It plans to go ahead with an ambitious £14m spending programme over the next 12 months, including a massive refit of sites at Hull, Leeds and Birmingham.

Stakis has changed the division's management team and radically overhauled the business in an attempt to give the casino mass-market appeal.

Analysts believe the group's financial results next Thursday will confirm that the casino business is on the road to recovery. A new casino at Edinburgh is also believed to be performing well.

In the longer term, Mr Michels believes the casino business has huge potential and the industry should benefit from the deregulation of the gaming industry. The Government is expected to pass legislation soon allowing casinos to start advertising and put their name in the phone book.

Stakis is also expected to continue launching another major acquisition or going on a building spree.

Stakis recently put eight of its worst-performing hotels in England and Scotland up for disposal. Four sales are understood to be in the hands of solicitors, but it is struggling to sell the other properties.

Stakis plans to expand its hotel division gradually and roll out new restaurants and health clubs, rather than launching

another major acquisition or going on a building spree.

Stakis is proceeding with a £25m refit of the London Metropole, a move designed to make it the biggest conference hotel in Europe.

Stakis is also expected to

firm that the performance of the £37m Metropole hotel chain it bought last year has beaten expectations.

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19/ECONOMICS



DAVID
OWEN
ON THE
NATIONAL
ASSET
REGISTER

The proper way to sell off the family silver

Gordon Brown has joined the Bank of England (and ourselves) in the camp that thinks the economy will display slow growth next year. His pre-Budget Report tilted the odds further in favour of a slowdown.

For one thing, an upward revision to the Treasury's 1998 inflation forecast gives the hawks on the Bank of England's Monetary Policy Committee further ammunition for raising interest rates. Moreover, despite announcing a further reduction in the mainstream corporation tax rate, changes in the timing of corporation tax payments will initially hit corporate cash-flow to the tune of £2.3bn in 1999/2000. This is going to cut investment rather than boost it.

Yet the most significant fiscal policy initiative came, not in the pre-Budget Report itself, but the previous day and was flagged up by Alistair Darling, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, when he published the National Asset Register.

Departments will be allowed to sell some of these "Domesday Book" assets as a source of finance for capital spending.

Contrary to popular opinion, it was a Labour Chancellor, Denis Healey, who started the privatisation ball rolling in the late 1970s with the sale of Associated British Ports. The Tories took the idea up in a massive way. To date, around £70bn has been raised from privatisations.

Many believe there were efficiency gains from transferring these assets to the private sector.

What was not so efficient was the macroeconomic impact of using the revenues raised to help finance the tax reductions of the 1980s.

The Government's current plans assume no privatisation receipts next fiscal year. Part of the rationale is that privatisation proceeds should only be scored for sales that have already been

announced. However, it may also be an indication that the Government is running out of assets to privatise.

What's more, the Government's new code for fiscal stability puts an emphasis on public sector balance sheets which will not encourage further widespread privatisations.

On current official estimates, public sector net wealth (the difference between Government-owned assets and liabilities) fell sharply from about 70 per cent of GDP in the 1980s to less than 10 per cent in 1996 (see chart).

The privatisations and historically low levels of public sector investment in the three years prior to the 1997 election have reduced the stock of Government assets to very low levels indeed. Transferring additional assets to the private sector would further weaken the balance sheet of the public sector.

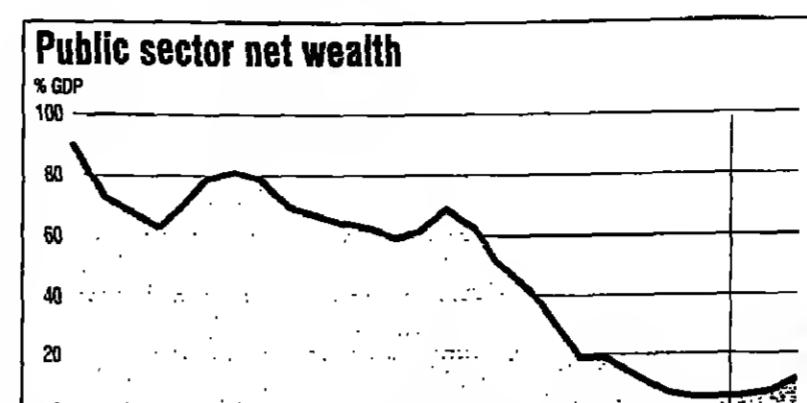
So how can it be that the Treasury will permit limited asset sales unencumbered in the new "Domesday Book"? The big difference (at least in theory) is that the proceeds can be used only to finance capital spending.

In effect, Mr Darling has paved the way for a significant increase in public sector investment.

Previous estimates suggested that, excluding local authorities and public corporations, central government has around £100bn of tangible assets, including land and buildings.

The National Asset Register suggests a much higher figure when small but valuable items are included. Although the 546-page document only puts a value to relatively few items, including Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (value £2.8m), officials were suggesting a total figure as high as £300bn.

For the three years from April 1998 to March 2001, the Treasury is to allow government departments to reinvest all receipts from the disposal of such assets.



vate sector could free up the cash for capital spending on politically sensitive areas such as infrastructure, health and education.

At least, this is the theory. To say that any asset sale could only be used to finance capital spending sounds easy.

In practice, how can the Treasury ensure that the money raised from asset sales goes only to finance additional public sector investment?

It is easy to see this rule slipping. The key test is whether "Domesday"-financed investment is an addition to investment that is already in the plans.

There is a big difference between the sale of an asset to finance additional capital expenditure and flogging it off simply to meet existing public sector expenditure targets.

If as likely, the overall control total for spending (both current and capital) is left unchanged, the use of asset sales in the latter case would merely free up money to boost current spending, including perhaps the public pay bill.

This would not have the same beneficial impact on the public sector's balance sheet as spending the money raised on capital expenditure over and above the existing plans.

The bigger problem is that, when the asset sales dry up in March 2001, Mr Brown would be left with high ongoing spending commitments which he would find difficult, if not impossible, to cut.

Running into an election, there would be pressure on him to maintain the momentum of spending in areas which were seen as earning a relatively immediate return.

Even with the best will in the world, it is easy to see the release of "Domesday" assets as ending up having unintended consequences.

David Owen is UK economist and a director of Dresdner Kleinwort Benson.

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India	£1.20	60p	50%
Egypt	£1.26	67p	47%
U.A.E.	£1.02	55p	46%
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Cull or cure dilemma as badgers get blame for epidemic



Dairy farmers in the west Midlands fear for their livelihoods as tuberculosis spreads through their herds 'like ripples on a pond'. Badgers carry the disease and are blamed by farmers for the losses. But, as Stephen Goodwin reports, conservationists and animal rights groups continue to argue that killing badgers is not the answer.

Ed Barker calls the 50-foot stretch of paw-trampled mounds and tunnel entrances 'Badger City'. The great sett lies beneath a strip of old hawthorns and hollies on the course of an ancient trackway. Ordinarily it wouldn't be a problem. Mr Barker counts himself as a friend of nature and used to take pleasure in the sight of a badger trundling along the hedge bottom.

But farmers have always been edgy about city folk and at Shawcroft Farm on the Staffordshire edge of the Peak District, Mr Barker has certainly lost his affection for the inhabitants of Badger City.

Last July, 20 of his cows tested positive for bovine TB and

bad to be slaughtered. The official clampdown that inevitably followed has cost him all this year's profit—about £30,000. Mr Barker is odd-jobbing on building sites to make ends meet. Meanwhile the badgers that he blames for the whole sorry mess are prospering, spreading from 'the city' to overspill setts under the protection of a government moratorium on culling infected badgers.

'Twenty years or so ago I decided to leave the area around the main sett alone for conservation,' the tenant farmer explained. 'I suppose it's one of those things that have come back to haunt me.' He had wanted to increase his herd to 120 cows and had hired a dairy maid to cope with the extra work. But movement restrictions imposed on farms hit by TB mean he cannot even replace the slaughtered cows.

Ground-nesting birds have also suffered in the explosion of badger numbers, according to Mr Barker. He believes there could be up to 50 badgers in the main sett alone. 'I now have no lapwings, curlews or wild pheasants because there are so many badgers searching for food and taking all the eggs in the spring.'

Until this year, bovine TB was largely confined to the south-west of England. Hundreds of farms have been af-

fected. But though the link between the disease in badgers and cows is generally accepted, scientists remain uncertain about the means of transmission and limited culling by Ministry of Agriculture (Maff) teams has failed to contain its spread. Farmers believe cows catch TB by eating grass where a badger has urinated.

With the disease creeping north, authority was granted to kill badgers in the newly hit areas. But on 20 May, before any badgers had been killed, the Government honoured an election promise to animal lovers and imposed a moratorium on new culls. Maff trapping teams were driving to Mr Barker's farm as the announcement was made and had to be called off by mobile phone.

At the time, just six herds had tested TB positive in Staffordshire, Shropshire and Cheshire. Today the figure is 49 blighted herds and rising, with Staffordshire the hardest hit. 'It isn't just the politicians are playing silly buggers with it; it's the badgers as well,' said one farmer. Because TB had been allowed to spread, ultimately more badgers would have to be killed, he argued.

Farmers and conservationists anxiously await the outcome of an independent scientific review on TB in cattle and badgers ordered a year ago by the Tory

government. Professor John Krebs has bandied his report to the Agriculture Minister, Jack Cunningham, but its publication has been delayed. 'Before Christmas', is Maff's latest forecast. There is a suspicion that review made uncomfortable reading for ministers whose stock has already fallen with the animal welfare lobby over fox-hunting.

The National Farmers' Union wants an end to moratorium in the west Midlands. A survey by the People's Trust of Endangered Species showed an 86 per cent increase in the badger population in the region over the past 10 years. In culls, badgers are cage-trapped, then shot. However, sow badgers with cubs must be released and the cull is confined to the TB-infected farms, even though the sett may be on a neighbour's land. Both limitations should be lifted, says the NFU.

Conservationists counter that since 20 years of culling badgers—some 25,000 have been killed in the South-West—has failed to eradicate TB there is no justification for continuing with the tactic. Dr Elaine King of the National Federation of Badger Groups said the NFU's call was irresponsible. 'It is also disgraceful to blame badgers for preying on ground nesting birds when it is well known recent farmland prac-

tices have caused the decline of many species.'

Dr Simon Lyster, director general of the Wildlife Trusts, said the present situation was 'unsatisfactory' for both farmers and badgers and a concerted effort was needed to find a solution. It might lie in changes to animal husbandry since the disease appeared to pass to some herds but not others, he suggested.

'What we don't want to see happen is just for the sake of political expediency ministers say "let's go and kill a few more badgers",' Dr Lyster said. 'That is what has happened in the past and it just doesn't work.'

Ed Barker at his Staffordshire farm where an outbreak of bovine TB resulted in the slaughter of 20 cattle and wiped out a year's profit. Photograph: Sean Page/Newsteam

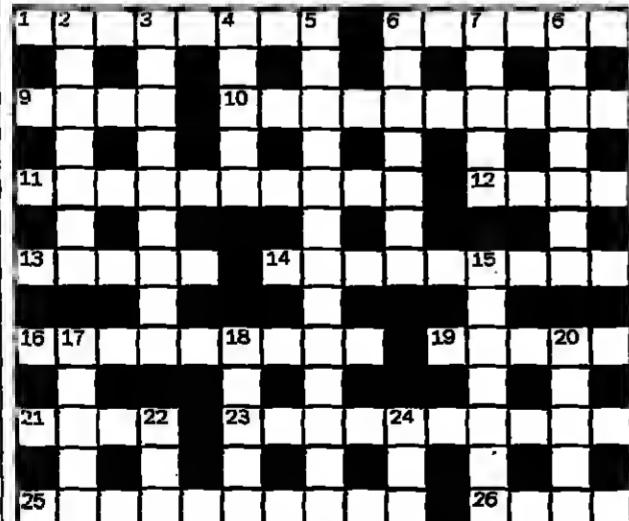
Right: The badger culling moratorium is blamed by farmers for rapid spread of the cattle disease. Photograph: Planet Earth Pictures



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By Peter

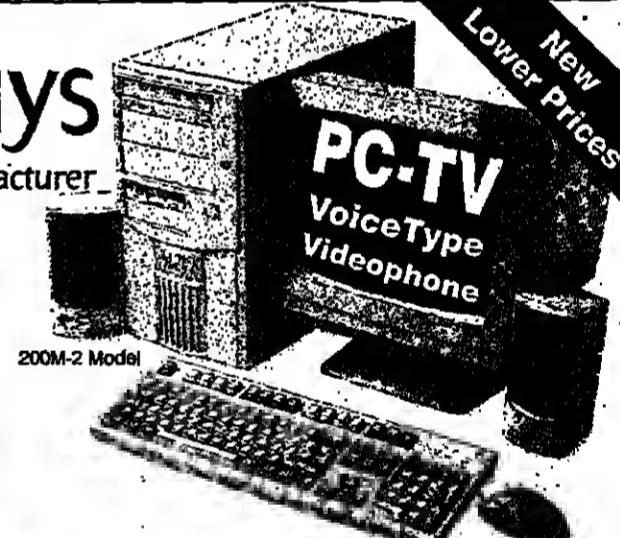


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